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## KNOWING THE AFRICAN

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THE CHRISTIAN MISSION IN AFRICA  
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THE ILA-SPEAKING PEOPLES OF NORTHERN  
RHODESIA (2 vols.)

# KNOWING THE AFRICAN

*by*

EDWIN W. SMITH



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TO  
MY FRIENDS  
IN  
CANADA  
AND THE  
UNITED STATES





## PREFACE

WHILE serving as visiting Professor at the Kennedy School of Missions at Hartford, Connecticut, I was invited by Dr. Lovell Murray to deliver a course of lectures in the Canadian School of Missions at Toronto. It is an annual course known as the Powell Lectures. The audience was composed of candidates and missionaries on furlough. At the time of delivery in 1940, and since, requests were made that I should publish the lectures. In now issuing them, I have brought them up to date by adding references to books and events. Some paragraphs have been omitted, a few others added, but substantially the lectures remain as they were delivered.

Chapter I was the opening lecture of another course, given at Hartford.

In Chapter 6 I have used some of the material contained in my contribution to *Essays presented to C. G. Seligman* (1934), with the permission of the publishers, Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Chapter 7 was originally a talk given at the Institute of Education, London University, and was printed in the *Journal of the Royal African Society*, January 1940. The Editor of that Journal has consented to its reproduction here.

EDWIN W. SMITH.

Kasenga,  
Chesham, Bucks.  
1 December, 1945.

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## Chapter One

### THE MISSIONARY'S OBJECTIVE

#### 1

**T**HE missionary's objective, what is it? In simpler words, What is it we are out to do?

If we pictured the missionary's life as a life of ease, we should be false to reality. If you are looking for an easy job, stay at home; there is no place for you on the mission field. And if you think it is the sort of job that any fool can undertake, well, think again. The life is one of self-denial.

I am not speaking of the surrender of home comforts. Some will no doubt find cosy houses to live in and many, if not all, the conveniences of western civilization. If you do not find them, you will know that these things matter very little, after all. It is of other and harder kinds of self-abnegation that I speak: the surrender of ambition; the abandonment of one's sense of superiority; the deliberate setting of oneself to serve hostile or indifferent and perhaps unprepossessing people: ceaseless self-giving, self-subordination, self-suppression.

If you are to carry on, with unflagging zeal, to the end of the course, you need to have a motive that sets and keeps your heart aflame with holy passion. And you must have a purpose, an aim, clearly defined, that captures and holds your entire being, mind and heart and soul—something for the attainment of which you are prepared to go all out and die, if necessary. To use military language, we must have an objective point—a

point towards which the advance of troops is directed, towards which they will fight their way and reach, or perish in the attempt; in modern idiom an objective.

What is our objective?

Do not be content with vague verbiage. Let us not befog ourselves with slogans, such as "We are out to save souls . . . We are out to make a new world". Think it out.

## 2

Let us clear the ground by defining the objective negatively: What it is not.

A Methodist local preacher took for his text: "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." "Brethren," he said, "I shall divide my subject under three heads. First, the world is wrongside up; second, the world wants turning upside down; and, third, we are the boys to do it."

Christianity is a revolutionary creed; though men may find difficulty in believing it in days when the Church is timorous, soft-spoken, acquiescent, ineffective.

I like what Giovanni Papini says of our Lord: he calls Him IL CAPOVOLGITORE.

"The greatest Upsetter is Jesus. The radical and fearless Turner-of-things-upside-down. At every step Jesus would have that the Base be recognized as the High, that the Last be the First, that the Outcast be the Preferred, that the Despised be the Venerated, that, in short, the old truth be considered as Error and the Common Life as Corruption and Death."

And when the Christ comes into men's hearts there will always be a transmutation of values. You will expect radical change of heart; you will work for it. But that does not mean you will go in an iconoclastic spirit, barging in and smashing right and left regardless

of consequence. You will remember that the Master said: "I came not to destroy but to fulfil." Whatever it may be, your business is not to pull down.

You recall Moloch in *Paradise Lost*:

No, let us rather choose  
Arm'd with Hell flames and fury all at once  
O'er Heaven's high Towers to force resistless way.

That is the Nazi manner; not the Christian.

There are people who would draw limits to Christian service, and draw them pretty tightly. This and that, forsooth, are not preaching the Gospel. No limits should be drawn that are narrower than human needs. Preaching; medical service; schools and colleges; agriculture; industry—all these come within the ambit of the things we can and must do, for Christ's sake. Yes, and if occasion calls for it, you will not hesitate to stand forth as the tribunes of your people and fight on their behalf, in the great Christian tradition, for justice; even at the risk of being called "political missionaries". You will come face to face with terrible social evils, which make you sick to contemplate—and you will rightly make it your business to bring about reform.

All these things, however, are ancillary to your great objective. You are out for something bigger than any humanitarian crusade, however noble that may be.

A trader, an Austrian Jew, said to me: "Mr. Smit, why doesn't your society send out more missionaries to this country?" I expressed pleasure and some surprise that he should take such interest in our work. "When I come to where you are and travel to other places where there are missionaries," he explained, "I sell lots of my goods. In other places they won't buy anything. I wish your society would send out a score more missionaries."

I have heard missionary leaders argue in a similar way, *ad crumenam*. To an assembly of merchants they would say: "Every dollar you subscribe to the mission funds will come back ten-fold in profits on the goods purchased by Christianised Africans." I have no doubt it is true, though as an argument for support of our work it is mean, ignoble.

Yet that is not the last word on the subject.

It has been affirmed that Christianity must have no dealings with economic and social questions. That was not the view of David Livingstone, of Thomas Fowell Buxton and the other men who laboured to put down the slave trade in Africa. "It is the Bible and the plough that must redeem Africa," said Buxton. "I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity," said Livingstone in 1857.

These men saw clearly that if the unholy traffic in men and women was to be ended, a righteous commerce must be substituted.

To-day we are faced, in Africa, India, China and elsewhere, with the problem of the economic basis of the indigenous Church. If you will read J. Merle Davis's book on the subject you will see how vital questions of economics are to the building up of the Church. It is a problem which we cannot shirk; one that has been too largely ignored in the past.

The Tambaram Council<sup>1</sup> fully recognized the importance of the subject, and took the wider view.

It said: "The task of helping to improve the economic condition of the Christian community is an essential part of the ministry of the Church. It is not merely a method for increasing the resources of the church organization. No ground should be provided for the

<sup>1</sup>Here and later by "the Tambaram Council" I mean the great international meeting at Madras in 1938. J. Merle Davis's book was one of the Reports submitted to the Council.

charge that the Church cares for the economic condition of its members only for the purpose of exacting contributions from them. In the spirit of the Master, Christians must try to lift their fellow men out of unbearable conditions. Christian love cannot be indifferent to economic suffering either within or without the household of faith. The Church must find ways to deal with this economic issue wisely and vigorously."

Agriculture, industry, commerce must all come within the modern missionary's purview. But these are part of the whole; your objective is bigger.

### 3

The things I have spoken about are not the Objective; but are part and parcel of it. I now speak of something that does not come into the Objective at all.

I take up a volume which treats of the education of the peoples who are now subjects of European Powers.<sup>1</sup> An eminent Portuguese gentleman states that from the beginning of her colonial enterprise Portugal has been preoccupied with educating the African. To facilitate the relations with the conquered peoples and to nationalize the territories, the Portuguese language ought progressively to be imposed upon them. And, he continues, "so it was that from the earliest days of our discoveries missionaries accompanied our sailors and acted as agents of civilization, teaching the natives the doctrine of Christ and the love of the King of Portugal".

You see the notion of missionaries that this representative Portuguese possesses. They are agents of civilization. I am not sure what he means precisely by

<sup>1</sup>*L'Enseignement aux Indigènes*; a preliminary report of the Institut Colonial International, Brussels, 1931, p. 711.



his final words: whether it is that the King loves the people or that the people are to love the King. Now that Portugal has no King, I suppose missionaries are expected to teach the Africans that the Republic loves them and that they ought to love the Republic.

What is our own attitude in this matter? In America and Great Britain—to speak only of them—how far does the same notion prevail? If it is not so baldly professed, to what degree is it expressed in our practice? We who have been missionaries—and we who are going to be missionaries—do we regard ourselves as agents of civilization or act as if we were?

Missionaries as a class figure in international agreements. Christian nations make treaties with non-Christian nations providing that missionaries shall be protected and unmolested in their work. If they are murdered, or the mission property is destroyed, the foreign government steps in to demand compensation or may even send a punitive expedition. Here, it may be said, the Christian government is acting on behalf of its nationals, just as it would act if merchants were concerned: they do not intervene on behalf of missionaries because these are considered as government agents of civilization.

But it cannot be denied, I think, that governments have used Missions for their own purposes. Even anti-clerical governments in France have supported the Church as a means of extending French influence abroad. Unconscious cultural penetration is one of the most pervasive and effective forms of national propaganda. Since missionaries give themselves ardently to education, it suits the governments well that they teach foreigners English or French as a means of extending English and French culture. Governments may favour missionaries of their own nationality rather than foreigners, simply because they know they can trust

their own nationals to propagate more effectively the national culture.

This relation of Christianity and western culture raises some of the most vital problems concerning missionary enterprise to-day.

We who go to India or China or Africa or elsewhere cannot divest ourselves of our western culture. We remain Americans or Britons wherever we go. Consciously or sub-consciously we know that we inherit a superior civilization. We think our ways of doing things are the best in the world. We glory in the achievements of our people. We consider that it would be a good thing for all the world if all the world could become as we are. We are anxious to share with others the benefits we enjoy. It is easy, fatally easy, for us to drift into believing that our civilization and Christianity are synonymous; and to think it our duty to be agents of that civilization as well as Christian missionaries.

Christianity and our civilization are not identical; but we often act as if we believed them to be identical. We expect our converts to conform to our mode of life, to adopt our institutions, our conventions, to worship God with our forms of ritual, to take over our architecture, our music, and even perhaps our language.

It is not too much to say that our missionary enterprise is impregnated with this superiority-complex. It comes out in all sorts of ways.

A friend of mine in Africa, an expert photographer and one of the most devoted Christians I ever knew, had the happy idea of making African illustrations for a translation of *Pilgrim's Progress*. He induced a number of Africans to act the scenes and he recorded these with his camera. When he showed me the very excellent photographs, I was horrified to notice that while up to the point where he became a Christian the pilgrim was dressed, like the other characters, in the handsome

flowing white robes that are the native costume, after he dropped the burden from his back he appeared in khaki shorts with an enormous sun-helmet of khaki on his head. In this instance khaki was taken to be the outward and visible sign of Christianity; the white *kanzu* the sign of heathenism. The suggestion appears to be that when an African becomes a Christian he must adopt the habiliments of western civilization—even when the native costume is more handsome than our own.

You see the same thing in the arts. When for about six months I travelled over the length and breadth of India, almost every church building screamed aloud that it was foreign: in most instances it was appallingly unattractive. Why the religion of Christ should be associated with ugly architecture I cannot understand.

You see the same thing in the insistence on the English language in the schools. Some people seem to imagine that when our Lord said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature", he really meant, "Go into all the world and teach the English language".

In a word, too often we take abroad not only the Gospel, but many things which are not specifically Christian—and we do not separate them.

A missionary in West Africa reported that none of the Christian natives he knew conceived it possible to be at once African and Christian.

Undoubtedly in some countries a certain prestige attaches to missionaries because they are British or American. The power and material resources of the European civilization impress the people. The glamour of western culture hangs about us. The Mission is identified with all the benefits that civilization brings. The young people flock to the schools. They do not come because they want our religion. They come be-

cause they want the good things that civilization seems to offer: that magic which is education. No doubt our Christianity has enormous assets in the beginning as the faith—the ostensible faith—of the ruling race in Africa. But how does it work out ultimately? One of the cardinal facts of the present world situation is the thing we call nationalism—hyper-nationalism, if you will. Some peoples are now going through a phase through which Americans and British went long ago when we shook ourselves free from foreign domination and developed our own institutions. In most countries religion is not divorced from the social system. The religions are intimately intertwined with national culture.

Muslims do not distinguish between Church and State; Hinduism is not only a religion, it is a social organism, a body of social custom. To change one's religion is to throw off traditional *mores*. That is what makes it so difficult for an Indian individual to become a Christian, avowedly a Christian: it means casting aside national ways of life and becoming a foreigner. And this becomes doubly difficult when nationalism is fervently preached and adopted with fanatical zeal.

Some peoples may be captured by the glamour of foreign ways but sooner or later the glamour fades and even in Africa they ask: "Have we no traditional culture of our own? Why should we surrender our heritage and make ourselves imitation white men?" So they question; so they doubt; and that is a time of peril for the Church if Christianity has been identified with western civilization. The almost inevitable consequence is that in rebelling against the imperialism of western culture they will refuse to entertain Christianity: it is a foreign religion.

We ourselves are not so self-complacent as our fathers were. The contradictions and blemishes of our

civilization are now only too apparent to us. We have awakened to the fact that not one of the so-called Christian nations is in fact Christian. We are not so eager as once we were to civilize the world after our pattern. We have learnt that even in the Africa so long despised there are elements of culture equal to and perhaps superior to our own, and much more consonant with Christianity than some of the elements in our civilization. The peoples we go to evangelize have also in some measure become aware of it. So you may have an Indian who, seeing his son inclined to become a Christian, sends him to London to cure him of Christianity.

Happily the truth is penetrating not only among ourselves but also among other people. They are coming—at least we hope so—to realize that Christ was not an American, not an Englishman; that his religion is not a British or American institution; that Christ transcends all nationalistic divisions.

To purge our missionary enterprise of all taint of cultural imperialism is one of the supreme needs to-day.

The events of to-day are thrusting us back upon first principles and forcing us to ask ourselves what it is that the Christian Church has to give to the world. There can be no doubt as to the answer. It is Christ; not western civilization.

I should like to quote at this point a passage from an address delivered from the Chair of the Royal Anthropological Institute when I was President. I was the first missionary to occupy that position—so far the only one to occupy it. I felt it incumbent upon me to define as I saw it the relationship between anthropology and the missionary enterprise. Granting that the Christian faith has vast sociological implications, that the insinuation of new ideas inevitably affects the attitude of people to their traditional culture; I allowed that

anthropologists had the right to criticize missionary methods—that, indeed, these are not above criticism. I denied that science can have any claim to question the Christian's obligation to carry out the commission given by Christ to the Apostles: his duty is a realm over which science has no jurisdiction. Then coming to the root of the matter, I spoke of the mistake people make of confounding Christianity with western civilization.

"I am convinced," I said, "that essential elements in Christian belief and practice are of universal value—that, in other words, there are fundamental needs of the human soul that Christ alone can satisfy. But in the Christianity which we know there are unessential elements, accretions which it has taken on from its European environment and which it is no part of the Christian missionary's duty to propagate. It is not his business to substitute European tribal customs for African or Polynesian.

"It is more than a matter of forms of behaviour. If the message of Christ was to win acceptance in the earliest days it had to be provided with an intellectual framework suitable to the age; Christ himself formulated no system of theology and ethics. Christianity pressed into its service current forms of thought; in some books of the New Testament we find its truths expressed in the terms of the Platonic philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

"It has always been a borrower; always a creative

<sup>1</sup>So Ernst Troeltsch in *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (English translation 1931) speaks of the appropriation by the early Christians of those elements in the religious and ethical philosophy of late antiquity which had an affinity with Christianity. The culminating act in this process, which was so significant for world history, was the fusion of Christianity with Platonism and the religious element in Stoicism. Platonism provided Christianity with its unique doctrine of redemption, with a universal foundation of mysticism. Stoicism gave Christian ethic both a theoretical foundation and a terminology. Troeltsch also speaks of the lead given by St. Paul to the adoption of the order of Roman society: distribution of property, divisions of class and rank, in fact, the whole social organization.

and transforming power. It is always making a new body for itself. If history shows it making itself a body, and renewing it from time to time, out of its European environment, can we deny Africans, Indians, Chinese, the right to express the essential Christianity in their forms of thought? Europeans cannot finally do this for them; they must do it for themselves; but at least Europeans ought to avoid the error of identifying the inward spirit of the religion with its European body. I believe that missionaries should encourage Africans to claim for Christ everything that is best in their own tradition—to take over into the Church whatever is not incompatible with the mind of Christ. That there is in African life much that is incompatible nobody will contest. There are things that revolt the toughest anthropologist. But out of the really vital elements of African life I believe the spirit of Christianity can form a body that will be at least as worthy as the European body."

All this, I think, is in keeping with the conclusions of the Tambaram Council:

"It is not in principle wrong or illegitimate that there should be, as interpretations of the one Gospel, many forms of Christianity. It is the Gospel of Christ which we are to give to others, and not our own particular form of Christianity. . . . An indigenous church, young or old, in the East or in the West, is a church which, rooted in obedience to Christ, spontaneously uses forms of thought and modes of action natural and familiar in its own environment. . . . Having learnt that in some cases missionaries are still eager to transplant the music, architecture, or other arts of their home churches to the life of the younger churches, we would urge upon missionaries the duty of helping the younger churches to express their Christian life in forms that are part of their nation's heritage."

## 4

I have said enough on the negative aspect of our subject; let us come to the positive. What is the missionary's objective? What is it we are out for?

We cannot do better than go back to the Master himself. Our objective is to be found in His commission to the apostles. This is expressed somewhat differently in Mark and Matthew. According to Mark, Jesus said: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation"—"to every creature", as Moffatt puts it. According to Matthew: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you."

The more I ponder these words, the more I am constrained to wonder at their sublimity, their spaciousness—may I say, their audacity. There is no limitation; no marking of frontiers. All authority. . . . All the world. . . . The whole creation. . . . All the nations. . . . There is something cosmical about it.

I know that it has been denied that Jesus ever said, or could have said it. I do not know who was big enough to have invented the great Commission. It is all of a piece with the rest of the Gospel.

"God so loved the world. . . ." "I am the light of the world. . . ." "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. . . ."

It is all of a piece with the claims He made for himself: "All authority hath been given unto me by my Father. . . . Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He speaks to man as man, not as a national of this or that clime, not as a member of this or that ethnical group: but to



essential man. Wherever there is a human being, labouring and heavy-laden, Christ offers him rest of soul.

The world mission of the followers of Christ depends not upon any single word of Christ, but upon all that He was and is, upon all that He said, upon all that He did. He says in effect: Because I am what I am, go out; do not stay within doors, within the limits of any one land, go out beyond the frontiers of civilization, wherever there is a human being: go out, despairing of no man, make disciples of all the nations.

What a rebuke there is here to all our petty parochialism—to all our little nationalisms!

"Little minds and a great empire go ill together," said Burke. There is nothing in common between little minds and the Mission entrusted to us by our Lord. Its spaciousness is not to be measured in terms of geography and ethnology alone. All the world means more than the continents and the islands of the sea. All the world includes all the multiple worlds of man's activity: his commerce, his governmental systems, his science, his art and literature, his social relationships, his national and international politics. Nothing human is alien to it. Everything human is within the scope and sweep of Christ's world.

I do not enter into any argument as to whether the original Commission given to the Apostles is binding also upon every disciple of Christ to-day. What did the Duke of Wellington say to the clergyman who questioned that the obligation rested upon the Christian people of his day? He sternly replied: "There are your marching-orders, sir."

But, humbly and thankfully, while we accept the obligation, let us try to understand what it is we are meant to do.

"Make disciples of all the nations"—what does that mean precisely? On the face of it, it might mean "gather disciples from out all nations". It has indeed been so interpreted. The missionary is to bring together elect souls into a Christian community. It is vain to expect that there can be, or ever will be, a flocking of the whole community to Christ. Your preaching is to be the means of singling out such as should be saved. Christ's vision is larger than that.

There is no Greek preposition *ek* in the phrase translated "make disciples of all nations". The Greek is *matbeteusate panta ta ethne*: "disciple all nations". Each nation, so I read the words to mean, is, as a nation, to be brought into the school of Christ and become His pupil, His disciple, His follower.

We touch here upon a question which perhaps every missionary has to answer sooner or later. Am I to aim at individual conversion only, or at bringing whole groups into the Church independent of individual conviction and decision? It is an old argument, debated again at the Tambaram Council. To many missionaries only one answer is possible. They would agree with Alexander Vinet who in the middle of last century led the revolt against the collectivist and national religion that for centuries had dominated Switzerland. To Vinet, what he called "a church of multitude", of which a person becomes a member without having undergone an examination of conscience, was anathema. And many eminent missionaries drank from that source. I refer you, for the general discussion, to the Tambaram volume on "Evangelism"; and for the attitude of one great missionary, to my book *The Mabilles of Basutoland*.

As Emil Brunner points out, the problem of the individual and the community is at the heart of all our modern problems, in politics and economics as well as in

the sphere of private and personal life; everywhere it raises passionate discussion, and causes terrible conflict and suffering. Is individualism or collectivism to prevail, the right of the individual personality or the right of the social entities: the State, the family, society? The freedom and independence of the individual, or the higher authority of the "whole" to which the individual must submit?

Troeltsch affirms that the outstanding characteristic of the Gospel ethic is an unlimited, unqualified individualism. It is an individualism which is entirely radical; it transcends all natural barriers and differences. Not man's rank or position in society, not the colour of his skin nor the traditional culture in which he is bred; nothing of this matters ultimately; only his self in the sight of God. Only an individual can be responsible; in the strict sense of the word the individual alone can be made responsible for anything. So says Brunner: "No romantic theory of the supra-personal subject—the "spirit of a people", the "soul of a nation", etc.—can blind our eyes to the fact that where decisions have to be made it is always the individual person alone who is concerned; his mind, his will is the source of all decisions." And so I must come before the Judge of the world quite alone. "Here is absolute, eternal, fathomless solitude . . . here am I, quite alone, in the presence of God, face to face; alone. . . and no other can take my place. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

An unlimited, unqualified individualism is the outstanding characteristic of the Gospel ethic, says Troeltsch; and apparently Brunner would say the same of the Gospel religion. But both these eminent writers know that this is not the whole truth. It is very far from being the whole truth. I cannot conceive of an "unqualified" individualism; certainly I cannot find it in

<sup>1</sup>Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, pp. 278-285.

the Gospel. Even Robinson Crusoe on his island, before man Friday appeared on the scene, was not so isolated and self-sufficient as philosophers have maintained. He was born of a mother into a family, a society, and however poor and destitute he was, he was still in a measure heir of all the ages. His guns and other things were washed ashore from the wreck: he did not invent them, did not make them. Like a good man, he carried his religion with him, and that also was not his apart from the community in which he had lived. An isolated individual does not, in fact, exist.

✓ An out-and-out individualism, whose creed is "Each man for himself and the devil may take the hindmost" is impossible in a world such as this. Equally impossible is a collectivism which denies individual rights and decrees that a man, every man, must act and think as the State decides. Its apotheosis in Nazism, Communism and Fascism, which has aroused passionate devotion in many deluded people, is in the nature of things doomed because it breaks upon the rock of the individual who knows he is an individual.

✓ There is truth in individualism; there is truth in collectivism. What the world needs supremely to-day is a synthesis of all that is good in the thesis of collectivism and the antithesis of individualism. The perfect synthesis is found—and only found—in the Kingdom of God.

Let us make no mistake here. The Kingdom of God is something more—something other—than the social ideal that many earnest people entertain. It is more than the promise of a new world in which equality, freedom, painlessness, satisfaction and peace shall reign; a new world to be made by men, as the current slogan runs. The Kingdom of God means renunciation of material, mechanistic, political and economic values. It is the Kingdom of *God*. It means, in Ernst Troeltsch's

words, a turning towards the religious treasures of peace of heart, love of humanity, fellowship with God.

"The message of Jesus," says Troeltsch, "is obviously purely religious; it issues directly from a very definite idea of God and of the Divine Will in relation to man. To Jesus the whole meaning of life is religious; His life and His teaching are wholly determined by His thought of God."

The Kingdom of God is central in our Lord's message to mankind. To quote Troeltsch again: it is that state of life in which God will have supreme control, when His will will be done on earth as it is now being done in heaven; in this Kingdom sin, suffering and pain will have been overcome and the true spiritual values, combined with single-eyed devotion to the Will of God, will shine out in the glory that is their due.

The Christian ideal is to be realized as a life in community; it can only be realized there. It exalts the individual but it knows (as Brunner puts it) that the truly personal is at the same time the truly social, expressing itself as love. Human existence is existence in responsibility. It is not self-centred and isolated; man's being consists in a relatedness: an active relatedness which is love.

Our Lord expressed this truth in terms of the human family—a family in which each single member knows himself as himself and yet as bound by indissoluble bonds to every other member: a biological unity realized in love. His followers are "brothers" within a family of which God is the Father: and He taught them to say when they prayed: "*Our* father."

And the Kingdom of God—the Realm of God—the Rule of God—is not other than the Family in which the Father-God is also King. Use which symbol you choose; the essential idea is the same.

And there, surely, is the missionary's objective. The

Kingdom of God, which embraces all the good that we can desire for mankind; God's dwelling-place with men—where with men He dwells, they are His people and God himself is with them; the new heaven and the new earth; the City illumined by the glory of God; the City into which men will bring the true glories and treasures of the nations; the Kingdom one day to be consummated in all its splendour, but present here and now wherever a human soul turns from his sin and lives in communion with God; coming and to come, coming without observation, yet coming, ever coming; not something we make but something we declare, as Jesus declared it; the Kingdom that is without frontiers; the Kingdom so precious that he who finds it esteems it better than all else—even life itself.

Men talk of "making a new world". All efforts to make a new world will fail that leave God out of account: conferences and treaties and societies may do much for the well-being of men; but they cannot make a new world. For a new world must come in the hearts of men; and men will not realize their fellowship one with another until their hearts are right with God.

The Tambaram Council had much to say, and not a word too much, about the Church as the herald, the interpreter, the exemplar of the Kingdom of God. It said not so much about the Kingdom itself. But this it did say:

"For Christ, the Kingdom of God was central. He called His followers to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness. Through acceptance of His call to suffering love and through trust in divine help, men are summoned to be co-workers with Him for the increase of justice, truth and brotherhood upon earth. His Kingdom is both within and beyond this world. It will be consummated in the final establishment of His glorious reign of Love and Righteousness, when there

shall be a new heaven and a new earth where death and sin shall be no more."

"To a torn and distracted and sinful world, we offer God's offer—the Kingdom of God. This is our answer to the world's need, for it is God's answer, and we present it with confidence for we know that human nature will work in God's way and no other. When we find the Kingdom of God we find ourselves."

This is the missionary's objective: one that is great enough in its splendour to call forth every power of mind and heart that a man or woman possesses; one to which we can devote ourselves without stint or fear of failure, for in it we are co-workers with God. The goal is not to be won with a wish; the price of it is to be paid in sweat and blood and tears. The road leads where the Master went—by way of the Cross. But the end is sure—in the patience of God.

## Chapter Two

### KNOW YOUR PEOPLE

#### 1

I TAKE my text from the advice given to teachers by Jean Jacques Rousseau: "Commencez donc par mieux étudier vos élèves, car très assurément vous ne les connaissez point!"<sup>1</sup>

It is a sound educational maxim that if you are to teach Jack arithmetic you must know Jack as well as arithmetic. The physician needs not only a full knowledge of physiology and medicine; he needs also to recognize the idiosyncracies of his patients—to know not only the patient's disease but also the patient attacked by that disease. The student of divinity is disciplined in mental sciences as well as in theology. If the merchant is to be successful in business he must make himself familiar with the habits and prejudices of the people whom he wishes to allure into purchasing his goods. In the jargon of the day: we must understand the psychology—the ideology—of our fellow-men if we are to conduct ourselves wisely toward them and influence them effectively.

These are elementary notions.

If ever a people needed to be convinced of their truth and to act consistently in accordance therewith, it is surely we British people to whom, in the providence of God, the well-being and progress of hundreds of millions of our fellow-beings have been entrusted.

<sup>1</sup>*Emile ou de l'éducation*, preface. "Begin then by studying your pupils thoroughly, for most assuredly you do not know them at all."



We have been slow in learning the lesson: we have not yet learnt it fully.

You will remember that in one of his Plain Tales, Rudyard Kipling tells of a certain Strickland who "held the extraordinary theory that a policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves". That theory is not so extraordinary to-day as it was in Kipling's early days.

In the course of later years what may be called a national policy has been slowly and painfully hammered out: a policy for the administration of the African peoples gathered under the British flag. There was a time when the governments were absorbed in the task of establishing law and order, in putting down slavery and inter-tribal wars, and in creating a revenue for purposes of civilized progress. Now the still greater task is being undertaken of re-building the structure of African life upon stable foundations.

The problem, as stated by Lord Lugard, is how to bring the experience of Europe into fruitful co-operation with what Africa has to give and what Africa understands. The aim of our methods of government and of our education system is, he declared, not to perpetuate barbarism or outworn traditions, but to adapt existing institutions worthy of survival, to accelerate a normal and national evolution, not merely an imitation of alien institutions. "The preservation of what is best in tribal administration may now be regarded as a national policy."

Let me also quote, in confirmation of this, what Mr. Amery, a former Secretary of State for the Colonies, has said: "Our whole principle is that of grafting our ideas and our civilization on to the root stocks which we know can grow in the soil and which we believe have in them innate powers of resistance and vitality."

It is obvious that if this ideal is to be realized it is

absolutely necessary that the "root-stocks", the culture upon which you are going to graft, must be first thoroughly examined and understood.

The logic of the situation is now recognized. The greatest, most successful, British administrators are those who have had that cultured sympathy with their people which comes of sure and intimate knowledge. There have always been such men in the Indian and Colonial services, men who before the rise of the science of social anthropology, studied the habits and customs of the people so that they might know them and govern them wisely. Nowadays officials are not left to grope their way in the dark. They are not sent out in ignorance of the people. Every colonial cadet is given specific training in social anthropology before he leaves England.

There is a close parallel between modern colonial policy and modern missionary policy.

You will see the parallel if you place over against the declarations I have just quoted sentences taken from the Reports of the Tambaram Council.

"It is the Gospel of Christ which we are to give to others, and not our own particular form of Christianity. . . . When Churches grow up in the environment of non-Christian religions and cultures, it is necessary that they should become firmly rooted in the Christian heritage and fellowship of the Church Universal. They have their place in the great Christian brotherhood of all ages and races. But they should also be rooted in the soil of their own country. Therefore we strongly affirm that the Gospel should be expressed and interpreted in indigenous forms, and that in methods of worship, institutions, architecture, etc., the spiritual heritage of the nation and country should be taken into use." In regard to religious education the Council said: "We recommend the extension in each mission field of the use of

curriculum materials which are rooted in the racial, cultural and religious experience of the people involved."

This declaration represented a distinct step forward in missionary policy. I do not wonder that some of our leaders feel that a new era dawned at Tambaram; and that now we can really settle down to the accomplishment of our great task.

I will not say that this policy demands better missionaries. I think the Church has reason to be proud of the men and women she has sent into the field. But I do say that the policy demands far better training of missionaries than the Church has yet given.

What lies behind those words: "The Gospel should be expressed and interpreted in indigenous forms . . . the spiritual heritage of the nation and country should be taken into use"? It means that the men and women we send out should be aware of the "indigenous forms", of the "spiritual heritage". How else are they to express and interpret the Gospel in indigenous forms? How else are they to take into use the spiritual heritage of the peoples in guiding them, in formulating methods of worship, in establishing Christian institutions?

It should no longer be possible for men and women to go into the field totally ignorant of the social structure, the religion, the customs, of the people; ignorant of the way in which native institutions may be used for building up the Church.

My purpose in these pages is to reinforce that conviction and in the light of it to illustrate some of the problems which face us to-day. For, let us make no mistake about it, the policy enunciated at Tambaram does not simplify our task: it enormously complicates it.

## 2

If the present policy had been adopted a century ago, and if men could have been trained to carry it out, many and serious blunders would have been avoided.

If you have read *The Golden Stool* you know the kind of blunder governments have made through ignorance of African custom. But administrators do not stand alone in this respect. Missionaries have lost their lives, have imperilled their mission, have raised prejudices against themselves and their message and, I do not hesitate to say, sometimes have done more harm than good, because they had not got to the back of the black man's mind and had no sympathy with it.

I could give many examples of this. Let two suffice.

Two pioneers of the Methodist Mission in Northern Rhodesia were camped near a village on the bank of the Zambezi. After dark they went for a stroll and entered the village. One of them was a builder and, interested in the construction of the village, stopped to draw a plan with his stick on the ground. Unfortunately this action was observed by some wakeful person. Next morning there was a hubbub. The two missionaries were arrested and taken before the native authorities and charged with bewitching the Queen, whose village it was. It was useless for them to protest their innocence. Had they not entered the village after nightfall? Had they not done precisely what a sorcerer would do who wished the death of a resident? A sorcerer, in fact, goes near to a man's house and draws circles on the ground around it, saying: "Herel and Herel!" He means, let the man's funeral fires be lighted here and here! By this act of dramatization he predicts and produces his victim's sudden death. And the missionaries had been seen doing it! Suddenly the people made a rush and seized

the two men, stamped upon them, dragged them away, face downwards, amidst frantic yells, to the river bank. "To the crocodiles!" was the cry—the common fate of witches in that part of Africa. They were saved from that ghastly death, but narrowly.

We have only to look at the matter through the eyes of the people to understand their anger. It is safe to say that if the missionaries had but known the significance of their action they would never have done what they did.

In 1882 Dr. Robert Laws of the Livingstonia Mission in Nyasaland paid a visit to Mombera, the Chief of the Angoni, a people who had forcibly made their way into the country from South Africa and had been, and still were, a disturbing element in the land. Dr. Laws' object was to bring about peace between them and a local tribe and to establish a mission that would perfect the peace. Mrs. Laws accompanied him. One day the little son of Mombera came to see the strangers. Mrs. Laws welcomed him and with a motherly gesture placed her hand on his head. The boy became ill and died. The Angoni warriors insisted that the white strangers should be put to death, for they believed that Mrs. Laws had bewitched their Chief's son; and there is little doubt that but for the affection which Mombera had conceived for Dr. Laws the whole party would have been massacred.<sup>1</sup> It is very likely that Dr. Laws never realized what had caused the failure of his visit. And the kindly Mrs. Laws certainly did not know the significance of her motherly gesture in the minds of the people. If she had known it she would have refrained from an act which, while its motive was so pure, bore such a terrible meaning to them. For, as they interpreted it, Mrs. Laws, when she placed her hand on the boy's head, was saying to herself: "So high . . . and never any higher!" In other words, she was predicting the boy's death; and since in

<sup>1</sup>W. P. Livingstone, *Laws of Livingstonia*, p. 200.

their estimation to predict is to procure, she was actually pronouncing a sentence of death upon him and indeed, killing him. This is not mere fancy on my part. African friends often warned me against this gesture, so natural to a kindly person, and explained its significance. It is easy to label it a superstition; but even the most emancipated would hardly think well of a person who should prophesy his child's speedy death; and what if he believed that his child's death was actually being effected?

Missionaries, administrators and others need to be endowed—or need to acquire—an anthropological mind; by which I mean they should learn the habit of regarding everything from the African's point of view. This will do much more than save them from making blunders.

We say that tact is needed: with his heavy-footed approach the tactless man says the wrong thing, rubs people up the wrong way, provokes enmity. The dictionary defines tact as "an intuitive perception of what is fitting". But intuition alone will not save us from treading on people's corns; we need to know that they have corns and just where these lie. "Sympathetic insight alone," says Oskar Pfister, a psychologist, "does not give us sufficient knowledge of what is happening in other souls, particularly when processes are at work that are foreign to our own psyche, or which we do not ourselves understand."<sup>1</sup>

We need to learn what in the African's eyes is fitting and what is unfitting. For after all, if we are to gain the people's good-will and esteem, we must act according to their code of decorum, not our own. There are essentials of gentlemanly conduct which are common to all men; but the etiquette, the expression in word, deed and attitude of inward respect, varies considerably from

<sup>1</sup>*Some applications of Psycho-analysis* (1923), p. 264.

people to people. It is in the small things of life that are of such vital importance that we offend and antagonize—the small things which so largely govern social relations.

The rudest of African tribes (according to our notions) have their code of behaviour. Too often the white man fails to recognize that the rules of etiquette exist, simply because these differ in some respects from his own. Sometimes, I fear, the white man not only breaks the native code; he acts contrary to his own; as if he could afford to treat Blacks with discourtesy.

I remember an English gentleman who visited us in Northern Rhodesia. An Ila woman came to speak to my wife while we were standing together. He did what he would not dream of doing to a woman of his own colour in his own drawing-room, or in hers. He fingered the fine doe-skin that the woman was wearing as a petticoat. He had no sense of offending; he was moved simply by curiosity and admiration for the beautiful skin. I was horrified. He was not only guilty of bad manners, by whatever code he might be judged; he was offending against a custom according to which fingering a woman's skirt is equivalent to adultery.

It has been said that over fifty per cent. of the troubles between White and Black in Africa are traceable to misunderstandings based on two things. First, ignorance of the language. Second, our tendency to think that the other fellow has the same view about essential things that we have; or that, even if the other fellow does not think and act as we do, at least he knows what are our point of view and our customs.

Africans look at many things very differently from ourselves. Take one obvious example. We regard spitting as a vulgar and unhygienic habit. To the African it may be a ceremonial act. It expresses a curse or a benediction according to the intention of the spitter

and the manner of spitting. It may be a sign of deep gratitude; or a form of greeting between relatives; it may be a sacramental act consecrating an offering to the gods. You need to know just why the African spits before you condemn him.

It is related that a British official was trying to arrange peace between two tribes who had long been hostile to each other. There was a big gathering of the Elders of the two groups, and on the outskirts of the assembly the fully-armed warriors stood watchful. It seemed that after long and heated argument a peaceful settlement was reached at last. The official beckoned the Chief of each tribe to approach, intending that they should shake hands to seal a pact of friendship. They came, and then—to his horror—they spat violently at each other and then turned and deliberately both spat at him. That was their method of signing the peace treaty. He quite naturally took it as a deadly insult to himself and also as an indication that the Chiefs could not agree. Rising to his feet he struck out with both fists at the Chiefs. There was an uproar; the warriors on both sides rushed in; the official's escort of police fought to save him. In the *melée* several people were killed. And all because the official did not know what spitting meant in that particular context of situation.

Such misunderstandings may be regarded as inevitable in view of the disparity between the white man's culture and the black man's. But from the white man's side they are not inevitable if there is a genuine desire and effort on his part to explore and comprehend the black man's point of view.

It is more difficult for the black man to understand us. He has no more than his unassisted intelligence to help him. The unsophisticated African must find it a very perplexing business to understand the apparent vagaries of the officials who administer him, of the employers



who order him about, and of the missionaries who come to teach him.

· 3

We cannot doubt that the African has his own point of view and that this point of view is different from our own. This is implied in all our present argument that Europeans should make an effort to get under the African's skin.

But wherein lies the diversity? I have heard it argued that the black man's brain is not only smaller in size than the white man's but is also of different structure. And the inference is drawn that the African's intelligence is therefore inferior to the European's; and it is hopeless to expect that the African can be raised by education to our level. Dr. Gordon has invented a term—*bradyphysis*—to denote the backward condition of tribes in Kenya, a condition which he appears to ascribe to the inferior quantity and quality of their brains.

But it is a fallacy to argue from physical to psychological conditions. Size of brain is no positive criterion of the value of the brain; it is not a certain index of the owner's attainments or potentialities. Is it not the case that some very eminent Europeans have had relatively small brains? Ancient inhabitants of South Africa, who had not risen above the Stone Age level of culture, had brains which in volume much exceeded the average given to Europeans. The size of the brain cannot be identified with its functionings. You cannot argue from "brains" to "braininess".<sup>1</sup>

Can it be said that an African's brain functions in a manner totally distinct from a European's? Nobody who has lived with Africans would seriously assert it, though it is often implied in rash statements about "fundamental differences in mentality".

<sup>1</sup>See Appendix, p. 48.

In his daily labours, in hoeing and sowing, in iron-smelting, in all his activities, the African is guided by knowledge and reason. His powers of observation are keen, his methods are rational. I have had many occasions to notice this.

I recall an untutored African who was a kind of foreman on our station. One of his jobs was to count and report every evening on the bundles of grass for thatching that the women brought in. One day he came and said: "Those women are cheating us. Come and see." We went to the heap of grass and taking up a bundle in his hand he said: "Look at that binding and this. This one was put on this evening; that one was put on yesterday; you can see the difference, this is so much fresher than that. What does it mean? It means that they are bringing in grass to be checked, and then when our backs are turned they are sneaking away with some of the same bundles and bringing them back again. This woman has given the game away: she neglected to change both the bindings." Sherlock Holmes could not have observed more closely nor reasoned more accurately.

It is true, of course, that what is called "magic" plays a part in the African's activities; and "magic" seems to us to be utterly irrational. But the African does not rely solely upon "magic". He employs it because he knows that the contingent always attends his efforts; there are unknown forces and possibilities that can be overcome or thwarted or used by means of the energies operative in what he calls "medicine"—in talisman, amulet and spell. Is he therefore "pre-logical" in contra-distinction to Europeans who are "logical"? Is his mentality so different from ours as to constitute a disparate species of thought and to make the ordinary laws of logic and psychology inapplicable to it?

You cannot in this matter draw a hard and fast line

between African and European. If there is such a thing as being "pre-logical" you will find it among ourselves as well as in Africa. I have amused myself by collecting instances of it in Europe, and in America. I attended a missionary convention where luck-tokens were on sale. Some of us know how Americans associate ill-fortune with a two-dollar bill. Has anyone ever found in America a hotel room numbered 13?

It would be difficult to find in Africa to-day any kind of custom or belief that has not at one time or another been found also in Europe. You will recall the witch-hunts in New England.

Prelogical mentality, collective representations and that quality called *mystique*, all characterize Europeans to-day. It would be more difficult to find those not so characterized than those that are.

If then the difference between the minds of African and European is not generic, wherein does it lie? I believe that the difference is primarily a social phenomenon. It is a matter of different social heritage. The African uses his mental powers under the influence of different systems of social organization and belief.

The African will argue as logically from his premisses as we argue from ours. If—as often happens—we cannot follow the working of his mind, nor he the working of ours, it is because we reason from different assumptions. His premisses are derived from his social tradition, imposed on him from his earliest days. In many respects, if not in all, the same is true of ourselves.

Where the African's mind does not work in the grooves of his social heritage, he is found often to be reaching conclusions as "logically", as "scientifically", as any intelligent and educated European.

If there were a generic—or genetic—disparity, it would be impossible for a white man to learn a black man's language, or a black man to learn our language.

But we know there are Europeans who, born and bred in Africa, speak the African languages as their own. Africans master English so perfectly as to pass with credit the same university examinations as white students.

Indeed it is only necessary to think of men like Aggrey to see how fallacious many of the depreciations of Africans are. There are many others like him. It may be said they are exceptionally brilliant; that one or half a dozen swallows do not make a summer; that one or half a dozen diamonds do not prove the existence of a Kimberley pipe. But a people that can throw up men of this intellectual and moral quality are not to be airily dismissed as inherently different from and inferior to the arrogant European.

If the gulf that at present separates us from the unsophisticated African is a matter of social heritage, then bridges may be built across the chasm. By a close study of African folkways, established beliefs and language, it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the African's mentality.

In 1890 when the Rev. James Luke was exploring an unknown river in West Africa he reached a village where no missionary had been before. Thousands of people assembled to hear what he had to say to them. He realized what a great opportunity it was; but where lay the avenues of approach to them? Where was the penny-space of common ground? He did not know their language; had to address them through an interpreter; and he sat down knowing that he had failed. He invited questions. One man asked: "Tell us, O white man, what would you advise us to do when an elephant breaks into our banana ground and lays it waste?" The missionary saw no hint of theology in this question. It appeared to be a practical matter that called for a concrete, straightforward answer. He replied: "We would advise

you to pump lead into the brutal!" He sensed at once that the people were disappointed; they had weighed the white man in the balance and found him wanting.

At the next village another great congregation faced him. After he had spoken to them, a question was fired at him. "Tell us, O white man, what would you do to the man who rises in the darkness of the night, creeps into a house, stabs a person to death, and comes forth crying: 'I am not responsible; it was Ifot!'" Supposing that this gory inquiry was less concerned with the religious than with the social life of the community, he gave the answer he considered warranted by our civilization, and gave it with some heat: "We would hang him on the nearest tree!" Again the head-shake of disappointment and the polite silence. He had failed to see the spiritual significance of the problems. "Our failure," he says, "made us feel that our brains should be taken out and buttered."

But his brains were all right. What he lacked was a knowledge of the people's experience. What the questions meant was this: "We live here under the oppressive power of evil spirits. You bring news of the Good Spirit. How would you apply His power to overcome and cast out those powers of evil which infest our fields and enfeeble our life?" The elephant was not an ordinary pachyderm, but one driven by—or possessed by—some demon. And that strange conception of Ifot, the fate on which a man shifts the blame for his crime: he is not responsible, he avers, because some evil thing has taken possession of him, mastering his will, blurring his sense of right and wrong: how can that evil thing be exorcized?<sup>1</sup>

Had Mr. Luke but understood the real problem which lay behind these apparently irrelevant questions, he

<sup>1</sup>James Luke, *Pioneering in Mary Slessor's Country* (1929), pp. 142 seqq.

would at least have gained the confidence of those people.

The problems that afflict the African's mind are not always our problems. The social evils which mar and degrade are often rooted in concepts which are utterly strange to us. If we are to heal we must diagnose aright. We must see things through the African's eyes. It can be done; but only by careful, painstaking, sympathetic study.

## 4

Is it necessary to point out that if this full understanding is to be reached, it must be approached through the medium of the vernacular?

We all know how formidable a barrier language is between peoples; how fruitful a source of bitterness and conflict.

We know the old chestnut of the Irish soldier and the French sentry.

"Qui va là?" the sentry challenged.

"Je," says the Irishman, knowing the language.

"Comment?" says the Frenchman.

"Arrah, come on yerself," says the Irishman. And then the row began.

It is not enough for a missionary to acquire a smattering of the language. I sometimes say a man does not know French unless he can meet a Parisian *cocher* on his own ground—even slang for slang, curse for curse. And you have not mastered the rich, flexible, mellifluous African tongue until you can sit down and discuss things and gossip and joke with every and any individual of the tribe, showing that you know the technicalities of every trade, the proverbs and the tales, and even the swear-words. It is not enough by any means to be able to deliver correctly a sermon that you have laboriously

prepared for a congregation accustomed to your peculiar idiom. Avoid interpreters as you would avoid the devil.

Only by a thorough mastery of the language can you reach to an understanding of the people.

It is equally true that to grasp the language thoroughly a wide and accurate knowledge of the people's life is essential.

I was once called into consultation when certain questions were being discussed in regard to the Oriental School in London. I was asked: "What would you say about the relation of anthropology and linguistics?" I had the answer pat: "It is like the opposite sides of a coin: inseparable."

If we have learnt anything in Africa it is that all aspects of culture are most intimately inter-related. Religion, law, custom, art: not one of these can be isolated from the rest and studied *in vacuo*; nor can language, which is another component of culture. Only when words are examined in close and intimate reference to the facts of life can their precise meaning be grasped. It is the social context that gives them meaning.

That sounds elementary enough. And yet how many disastrous mistakes have been made in Africa through a neglect of that elementary truth. At least one heresy, splitting the Church asunder, can be traced to an erroneous translation of a word in the Bible. The translator came to the text: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Not knowing, and not taking the pains to inquire as to the Africans' belief in witchcraft, he translated "witch" by *musawo*, which means the "witch-finder", the "doctor". "Thou shalt not suffer a doctor to live"—was offered to the people as the authentic Word of God. Basing their doctrine upon that text a sect arose which refused to call in a physician or use medicine.

Sometimes translators who have not penetrated to an exact knowledge of African religion have taken—or

wished to take—the word *muzimu* for the Holy Spirit. Muzimu really is the disembodied human spirit and no more: you cannot teach your people that the Holy Spirit was once a human being.

Let such examples—which might easily be multiplied—impress this vital truth upon us: study of the language and study of the beliefs and practices must go hand in hand.

## 5

If we are to work effectively *with* the Africans—and not merely *for* them—it is essential to have that cultured sympathy with them which comes of sure knowledge. A hard, severe, censorious, hyper-critical outlook renders an observer incapable of appreciating the real values in African life.

Browning's *Paracelsus* expresses the reasons for many failures:

To see a good in evil, and a hope  
In ill-success: to sympathize, be proud  
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim  
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies;  
Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts:  
All with a touch of nobleness, despite  
Their error, upward tending all though weak;  
Like plants in mine, which never saw the sun,  
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,  
And do their best to climb and get to him—  
All this I knew not, and I failed.

I am not asking for a sloppy sentimentalism; but for a clear-eyed all-round survey of the truth. Blinkers should not be part of any missionary's outfit. Learn the facts, however unpleasant they may be.



Bacon said: "A little Philosophy inclineth Mans Minde to Atheisme; But depth in Philosophy bringeth Mens Mindes about to Religion." And it is my experience that, while a shallow acquaintance with African life may lead to disgust and despair, fuller knowledge of it brings the mind about to hope. For it reveals so much that is noble, so much that is rich in promise of better things. It is only when you have a large measure of that informed sympathy with the people that you have any right to judge them. It is only then that you can discriminate between what is compatible in their life with Christianity and what is incompatible.

An understanding of the people will do more than save you from making blunders; more than enable you to present the Gospel in terms that will appeal to them because based upon their own ways of thinking. You can go a step further—the step that the Tambaram Council strongly affirmed ought to be taken: the Gospel should be expressed and interpreted in indigenous forms; in methods of worship, institutions, architecture, etc., the spiritual heritage of the nation and country should be taken into use.

I am distressed when a missionary tells me that his people cannot see that an African may be a Christian and an African. It is not our business to uproot African life and transplant all our Western culture. It is not our business to substitute European tribal customs for African. I believe that—as we said at Le Zoute<sup>1</sup>—everything that is good in the African's heritage should be conserved, enriched and ennobled with the spirit of Christ.

I plead then for a fuller understanding of African life.

Some people who would agree with all, or most of

<sup>1</sup>The International Conference on African affairs held at Le Zoute, Belgium, in 1926.

what I have said, yet refuse to admit that missionaries should receive training in social anthropology before going to the field. They think that missionaries can learn all that is necessary about the people after they arrive among them.

I speak out of bitter experience. I was in a better position than most men, for my Society sent me for a year to the French Protestant Mission in Basutoland. I was the pupil of some of the finest missionaries who ever stepped on the shore of Africa. I was not strange to the Africans for I was born and brought up among them. Yet when I reached the Ba-ila, a people of whom nothing much was known, whose language had never been reduced to writing, I was helpless in my ignorance. Only after long and painful years did I win through to something like an understanding of them. How often did I say to myself: Would to God that for even half an hour I might get beneath their skin and see the world through their eyes! If only I could have had the teaching that now it is possible for men and women to receive beforehand, how many years of groping and blundering I should have been saved!

If now I plead that men and women should have the fullest training possible, it is not because I had it myself; it is because I did not have it; and because I know how much my work suffered for lack of it.

The study of social anthropology, as it is taught to-day, can be of immense service. After all, what is anthropology but talking about people? You cannot learn all there is to know about your tribe; certainly not all there is to know about all African tribes. But you can learn much about the point of view of the Africans; the general features of their social structure; the basis of their morality; the nature of their religion. You can be given the right attitude in which to approach the people. You can learn what others have said about the

problems that will face you and benefit by their experience in tackling them.

When anyone says to me that a missionary can learn on the field all he needs to know, I ask, Would you apply the same argument to a medical man, to a nursing sister? Send him out untrained to learn empirically how to dispense medicine, how to operate for gall stones? Send her untrained to nurse blackwater fever patients?

Do you say that the doctor's and the nurse's are highly specialized professions? Well, so is the missionary's who in these days has to care for the African's soul and guide the African in finding his way to a reconstruction of his society under the stress of modern conditions.

Believe me, he and she need all the training you can give them.

## APPENDIX

The argument on pp. 38-40 may be strengthened by the following quotation from a work by a distinguished anatomist, Professor M. F. Ashley Montagu (*Man's Most Dangerous Myth: the Fallacy of Race*, 1945).

"The cranial capacity of a number of palaeolithic Neanderthal men was, on the average, 1,625 c.c. What an extraordinary situation! Primitive Neanderthal man, who lived more than 50,000 years ago, had a larger brain than the average white man to-day. Strange that this elementary fact has been so consistently overlooked. Are we to assume, then, that these Neanderthal men were culturally and intellectually superior to the average modern white man? The Negro has an average cranial capacity of 1400 c.c., 50 c.c. less than the white, whereas the modern white has a cranial capacity which is lower than that of Neanderthal men by 200 c.c. Are we to

draw the conclusion from these facts, then, that the modern white is intellectually as much inferior to Neanderthal man as the Negro is to the white? We believe not. . . . Neanderthal man was neither inferior nor superior to modern man because of his large brain—he was inferior culturally to modern man for the simple reason that the opportunities for cultural development which were open to him were strictly limited.”—pp. 54, 55.

“In short, no statement concerning the mentality of an individual or a group is of any value unless it is accompanied by a specification of the conditions of the cultural environment in which that mentality has developed.”—p. 57.

“Were the brains of the Britons up to the time of Cæsar’s arrival made of such inferior stuff that they could only assume efficient qualities by the injection of new genes? Clearly, genes and brain had nothing to do with the matter; on the other hand, cultural stimulation had everything to do with the development which followed upon the Roman conquest. . . . In short, it is culture which makes ‘brains’; not brains culture.”—p. 59.

“There is no evidence that any people is mentally either superior or inferior to any other people in any way whatever. All that we know is that there exist considerable cultural differences between peoples and that these cultural differences are readily to be explained upon purely historical grounds, not upon any biological ones.”—p. 60.

## Chapter Three

### THE CHANGING AFRICAN

#### 1

**T**HERE are two errors into which we are liable to fall when dealing with the life of Africans. The first is to minimize the importance of the individual; and the second is to consider African society as static. The two errors are not unrelated.

African society is often called "collectivistic". This indicates that the individual is far less distinct from his group than he is in a European community. Some would say that he never really attains his majority; he always remains more or less in the tutelage of his family, clan and tribe. Others maintain that the unit of African society is never the individual but always the clan. If he commits a wrong the whole clan is involved; it acknowledges a collective responsibility and pays his fine. If he is killed, it is the blood of the clan that has been shed; and the clan is entitled to compensation or to vengeance. If he wishes to marry, it is the clan that takes the business in hand, and passes over to the woman's clan the cattle that guarantee her proper treatment.

I do not deny the solidarity of African society. There are features in it that I admire—features that seem to me to be much more admirable than many things in our very individualistic society.

But it is a fallacy to represent that solidarity as an enslavement of the individual to the group even to the point of absorption; to say that all individual initiative is

restricted and fettered by an inexorable group-tyranny; and then to argue that African society is essentially static.

African religion is counted among the strongest forces of conservatism. Where you have a cult of the dead, it is said, the very idea of change in the customs of the fathers and the laws which they have handed down is regarded with horror as dishonour, if not treachery, to the gods. Professor John Murphy goes so far as to say that the customs are so implicitly obeyed that they might be called the instincts of the tribe.

These views are exaggerated. African society is undoubtedly conservative; but the misoneism, the hatred of anything new and consequent aversion to change, is never absolute.

Let us remind ourselves that the greater part of Africa is inhabited by Negroes or Negroid peoples who presumably had a common origin somewhere and in course of time spread over the area which they now occupy. The general similarities in physical characters and culture testify to that fact; but the no less marked variations in both particulars prove that great changes have taken place. This surely indicates that any theory of immutability is untenable.

How have changes taken place?

I suggest, first, that they have come about through the initiative of individuals.

## 2

We rightfully insist upon the power of society over its members. In Africa, as elsewhere, isolated individuals are not to be found. It is always a-man-in-a-group that we have to deal with. But let us not forget that groups are composed of individuals.

Africans, like ourselves, are not cast in one mould.

The Ba-ila say: *Tatuzanda kasutasuta kei*: "We dislike the arrogance of the egg." If you look at a nest of eggs they seem to be all alike. The Ba-ila discountenance all pretensions of men to an equality that is contrary to nature. They know that men are born with different predispositions and abilities.

You cannot live among Africans without becoming aware of the differences between individuals. No more than ourselves are they like eggs in a basket. They inherit impulses which work in different directions, and which give rise to conflict.

I conceive African society to be in a state of tension. The community can only exist if it controls, inhibits, the impulses of its members. If it were to succeed in stamping out all freedom of thought and action, stagnation and death would follow. But it never completely overcomes the adventurous impulse to launch out upon the new and the unknown. We may be quite sure that a variation in human culture often takes its rise in the mind of an individual.

We can see how it works. As Professor Hobhouse points out, we observe the process beginning in our own nursery. "The small child begs to sit up an extra ten minutes on a special occasion. Next evening the unsuspecting parent finds that the privilege has become a precedent." Put an African in the place of the child and African society in the place of the parents; then you will see the origin of many changes in custom. A man "tries it on"; if the experiment is not resented, it becomes a precedent and is adopted by other people.

Of course society generally resents any alteration in its ways; to keep in the old ruts is safest; and society's reaction against the innovator is often violent.

Among the Zulus the Great Wife of the Chief provides the heir. Even though the Chief has older sons by other wives his son by the Great Wife is the successor

to his dignity. A certain man named Nomo tried to upset this well-established custom. He preached the fallacy that seniority of age implied logically seniority of rank. He met with no support. Dingiswayo, the Paramount, advised him to keep his heresy to himself. Nomo persisted, however, and suddenly—he died. That is frequently the fate of innovators, in Africa as elsewhere.

But others have succeeded in breaking old customs and escaping the wrath of outraged public opinion; and their innovations have come to be regarded as among the things “that were always done”. Naturally, the likelihood of success depends largely upon the personal energy and influence of the innovator.

Dr. Paul Radin<sup>1</sup> has done well to insist that, in Africa as well as in other communities of backward culture there are philosophers, doubters, sceptics, potential and actual rebels; and that to underestimate the contribution and influence of such thinkers is a serious error. I am the more interested in Dr. Radin's insistence on this important truth because he selects examples from *The Ill-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*. He quotes two discourses about God which I took down verbatim from two old pagans; and says that scepticism and doubt, fear and bewilderment mingle in them with acceptance and gratitude. He cites some of the names which Ba-ila give to God—“critical names, where rebellion breaks out in open flame”. “Never surely was a more mordant and utterly destructive criticism passed upon a god.” And he goes on to say: “In the face of this remarkable evidence, which probably represents only a small portion of what is still to be obtained, it is manifestly unfair to contend that primitive people are deficient either in the power of abstract thought or in the power of arranging these thoughts in systematic order, or, finally, of

<sup>1</sup>Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (1927).



subjecting them and their whole environment to an objective critique."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Radin does not claim that the average man is a rebel and a sceptic. It is his contention that there are outstanding men who do use their brains and are not content to follow the common herd.

No doubt African philosophers have shared the fate of Socrates as corrupters of youth; but we may imagine that many mutations of custom have originated with them.

Chiefs and prophets have probably been still more influential in this direction.

In considering Chiefs as factors of change we must remember that in normal African society the Chief is not a dictator. It is the Chief-in-Council that is the legislative and judicial authority. The Council consists of subsidiary Chiefs and Headmen. Among some tribes, when additions to the laws or amendments to them are to be made, the regular procedure is for them to be considered first by the Chief-in-Council and then for them to be submitted to an assembly of the whole tribe. There they are exhaustively discussed, every commoner having the right of free speech. Changes thus carried out, emanating perhaps from the mind of some individual, are in reality acts of the whole people.

Moshesh, the great Chief of the Basuto, was carrying out an old principle under new conditions when in 1854 he issued an ordinance against the introduction and sale of the White man's liquors: the subscription ran thus: "Given with the advice and concurrence of the great men of our tribe." The following year he issued a proclamation against divination, "assented to" it was expressly stated, "by all men in the tribe". The form and inspiration of these laws owed something to the French missionaries, but the procedure was the normal one.

<sup>1</sup>*Op cit.*, p. 384.

Some of the great African kings were undoubtedly autocratic; and it would appear that they had power to change law and custom arbitrarily.

It is said of Nyikang, the invading king of the Shilluks, that his authority was absolute. His son, we are told, fell in love with and married his half-sister, contrary to established rules; and thereupon Nyikang decreed that every future Shilluk king should marry his half-sister. The order is said to be obeyed to this day.

One of the most remarkable instances of innovation is that attributed to Kalamba, a renowned Chief of the Bashilange. He and his sister became convinced that a sort of state religion might be the best means of uniting and holding their people together. By his order all the old fetishes and magic implements were destroyed; and in their place he established the cult of Indian hemp (*riamba*). This was henceforth to be the universal protective against all evil and the sacred symbol of peace and friendship.

The new cult forbade animosity and the carrying of weapons; it commanded comradeship and hospitality. Moreover, in order to sever connection with infidels who smoked not hemp, Kalamba made many sweeping changes in custom. He prohibited the bride-wealth handed over in the form of goats to a woman's family on her marriage; and in order to enforce the new law he caused all goats to be destroyed. 'Wissmann said that the mad passion for hemp was carrying the majority of this highly developed people to an untimely grave.<sup>1</sup>

If ever there was a despotic ruler in Africa it was Chaka, the Zulu Chief; from all accounts he was the complete tyrant. "Justice, sexual propriety, mercy and all the rest of the moral code were as he ordained, and apart from him were not." Nothing in his numerous

<sup>1</sup>H. Von Wissmann, *Through Equatorial Africa* (1891), pp. 306 seqq; Ditto with others, *In Innern Afrikas* (1888), p. 155.

innovations is more remarkable than his attempts to inhibit sex. The amorous propensities of his warriors and the girls were sternly repressed. To dare to have a sweetheart prematurely—that is to say, before the conclusion of military service—was to put one's head right in the noose. In this respect, in this impossible struggle against nature, Chaka failed; but in other respects he succeeded in inculcating nobility of character. Mr. Bryant ventures so far—much further than I would dare to go—as to say that Chaka was as sublime a moral teacher as he was a martial genius. "All the noblest disciplines of life were the very foundation stones upon which he built his nation."<sup>1</sup>

In Uganda the most important woman next to the Queen Mother was the sister of the King with whom he shared the throne. She bore the title Nalinya ("I will climb"). She had a palace of her own, which was in charge of a chief: at night he had to see that all the gates were well guarded. This was one of the many measures taken to ensure the chastity of the Nalinya. On the advice, it is said, of a Roman Catholic missionary, King Mwanga abolished the law imposing lifelong celibacy on the Nalinya. His aunt, the Nalinya of his predecessor Mutesa, a woman between 60 and 70 years of age, thereupon married a young man. Mutesa himself, whose name is famous in the history of Uganda, introduced many changes in the social life of his people. The early years of his reign were marked by great cruelty; but under the good influence of his prime minister, Kira,—and, it is said, under that of Arab teachers and still more of the travellers Speke and Stanley—he prohibited drunkenness, the traffic in slaves, and the waging of war on other tribes.

Always in considering African society we must

<sup>1</sup>A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929) pp. 633 *seqq.*

remember that the visible members of the community do not constitute the whole: those whom we call the dead are still members of the community. They are living and active. They are in a peculiar sense custodians of the tribal traditions; any departure from the established order of things without their consent is an offence against them.

By various arts of divination men may ascertain the will of these invisible members. We also have in Africa mediums such as are known in spiritualist circles—men and women through whom the spirits speak. And there are the prophets who play so large a part in African history. They come speaking, not in trance but with their natural voice, and bringing a message from the ancestors or even from the Creator himself.

I am persuaded that many a change in law and custom might be traced to these prophets. Sometimes, I can well believe, the claim to receiving divine communications is only a pretence. The prophet may be a tool in the hands of a Chief who knows full well that a change of custom is more likely to receive favourable attention if announced as a direct command from the unseen world. But even so, prophets are a real factor in cultural variation.

### 3

So much, then, for the changes that are due to individuals. Changes are also brought about by the impact of one people upon another.

This is a familiar phenomenon to students of human societies. History is full of examples. Nationalities often undergo great and even rapid changes in response to stimulus coming through contact with other peoples. It is not entirely, or chiefly, a simple and mechanical process of imitation. The response may be very com-

plex. The result may be something quite unexpected. Something may be produced that is very different indeed from either of the two peoples who have produced it. It is in general, as Professor Hobhouse tells us, impossible to predict how a people will react to a new stimulus on the strength of their past history when that stimulus was absent.

A molecule of water is formed by the combination of hydrogen and oxygen. It is something new: not hydrogen plus oxygen, but water. "In the combination, potentialities previously latent in the hydrogen and oxygen have become actualized, with the consequence that the molecule of water exhibits qualities and properties not exhibited by, nor discoverable in, hydrogen in their pure state."<sup>1</sup> This is an instance of emergence in the realm of chemistry. So in the realm of sociology, when one people combines with another, new qualities may emerge that perhaps were latent in them but were not actual previous to their coming together. Even when there is no actual fusion of the two peoples, the impact of one people upon another may produce a cultural fusion.

Let us remember these further words of Professor Hobhouse: "In sum, races show considerable powers of adaptation, and the limits of these powers cannot be determined from any consideration of their history before the stimulus to adaptation occurred." The only quarrel I have with that statement is the use of the word "races". Let us rather speak of ethnic groups, for the word "race" has lost repute on account of the unscientific way in which it has been employed.

In Africa to-day we are witnessing rapid changes in the indigenous society as a result of the influx of the white man. We want to know what is taking place. It

<sup>1</sup>William McDougall, *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution* (1934), p. 114.

may seem to us that the process is one of unmitigated disintegration. The white man—be he trader, industrialist, settler, official or missionary—appears to be engaged in breaking down the tribal structure, the social controls. Is any adaptation to the new conditions taking place? Is something new being built up in the place of what has been destroyed? What is going finally to emerge from the present welter? Is there anything in the African's past experience that shows him to have adaptability? Will he come to terms with the invading civilization, selecting some features, rejecting others, and producing a new African civilization—a *tertium quid*—something unlike either the old culture or the intrusive culture?

We have no complete answer to such questions. But some interesting suggestions are to be drawn from a study of what has happened in the past.

Long before the White man came flooding into Africa there were clashes and combinations of peoples. What was the outcome?

Some years ago when my late friend Emil Torday penetrated to a group of tribes in the Belgian Congo he was astonished to find a degree of civilization—and particularly a proficiency in the arts—far superior to anything he had encountered elsewhere. Apparently every man and woman was an artist. Mr. Torday delved into the history of the Bushongo—the traditions that speak of 120 successive Chiefs. He found good reason to conclude that one section had come down—perhaps in the sixth, perhaps in the eleventh century—from the far north in the Sudan. They were fighters and the possession of that formidable weapon, the *shongo* throwing-knife, gave them irresistible power.

These Sudanic people established themselves as a ruling class among agricultural Baluba. They married Luba women and consequently in the course of a few

generations their Sudanic language disappeared, save in a few full-blooded aristocratic families. We may conclude that the Sudanese knew the secret of iron-working. The Baluba were perhaps craftsmen of a mediocre quality. From everything we know, or can conjecture, there was nothing in the previous experience of either people that would lead us to expect such an efflorescence of artistic culture as followed their amalgamation and which earns for them the name of being the greatest artists in black Africa.

In all probability the Baluba had no more than the simple social organization characteristic of the Bantu. The invaders adopted much of it—the matriarchal succession, the clan-system with exogamy. But they brought in the institution of the priest-king and on the basis of the normal village council there developed a highly complex central organization. Mr. Torday gives a long list of the dignitaries: military and treasury officers, judges, female elders and representative councillors: even the Pygmies had their representatives.

We have here a remarkable instance of the amalgamation of two peoples who originally were very different in culture. The features that distinguished the united people when Mr. Torday discovered them were not part of the original culture of either of the two components: the elaborate organization, the efficiency in the arts, arose from the contact of the two peoples: the two bodies producing a compound unlike either of the parts.

We may postulate a high capacity for progress in both peoples; and evidently the security, the freedom from anxiety, produced by a strong central government, gave an opportunity for these innate tendencies to develop.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Emil Torday, *On the Trail of the Bushongo* (1925), pp. 141 *seqq.*

If we travel to the region of the great lakes we meet another example of a similar kind. The early explorers—Speke and Grant and H. M. Stanley—were astonished by the high level of civilization which they found. We know that it was produced by the impact of a foreign people upon the indigenous Bantu.

In the fifteenth century the Bantu of the region were probably very much like the Baluba: agriculturists, hunters and trappers, with simple arts such as pottery and basketwork, but possessing also short-horned cattle. Few if any of the tribes were ruled by paramount Chiefs. There was little cohesion among them for resisting an invader. The invaders were Hamites from the north-east; pastoral peoples, owning long-horned cattle, with no permanent political head, but organized for war and inured to military discipline. Physically and culturally they were in complete contrast to the Bantu. They established what came to be a great kingdom, which ultimately split up into several kingdoms.

How deeply they affected the indigenous people depended upon several things: chiefly, perhaps, the physical character of the country. Where it was favourable to the keeping of cattle, as in Ankole, the local inhabitants were reduced to serfdom and the land was appropriated. To this day, the Hamitic invaders and the indigenous people have remained distinct. They made no real attempt to impart their culture to the indigenous people; and these show no sign of cultural growth as a result of their contact with the Hamites, but very definite signs of cultural decay. So says Mr. J. H. Driberg.<sup>1</sup>

In Buganda the picture is different. The original elements were the same: indigenous Bantu and invading Hamites. But there has been assimilation, not subjection; a blending of cultures, not a super-imposition. The

<sup>1</sup>J. H. Driberg, *The East African Problem* (1930), pp. 15 *seqq.*



contact was creative. The result is a genuine *tertium quid*.

It is not difficult to account for the different result. The Hamitic invaders were evidently fewer in number. Buganda was one of the latest provinces to become incorporated into their empire; their authority was never fully consolidated; the local population was never completely dominated.

Buganda became a separate kingdom; and the two components of the population soon blended. The Bantu acquired all the culture the invaders had to impart. The contact proved so fertile and stimulating that they progressed far beyond the cultural attainments of their masters. The civilization which emerged was a great achievement: an achievement to which the indigenous culture could not have aspired without the stimulus given to it by alien invasion. With the Buganda, in contrast to the people of Ankole, says Driberg, "the contact resulted in the assimilation of what was acceptable to the indigenous culture, and this resulted in a natural organic growth and the creation of a new culture far outstripping its predecessors".

## 4

I set out to show that in the past African society was not static. If I were writing a book on the subject I should have to deal with all the cultural changes that have taken place over a large part of Africa through the invasion of the Arabs with their religion, Islam. Long-headed natives of Northern Arabia, broad-headed natives of southern Arabia, have flowed over much of the continent, have mingled their blood with other Brown peoples, as well as with the Blacks, and everywhere have had a profound and lasting effect, breaking down indigenous cultures, imparting much of their own,

introducing new vegetable plants, and setting up movements and blendings that go a long way towards explaining the history of Africa, north of the equator.

The Africans have had to pay heavily for any benefit received from them; for the Arabs and their followers were the great slave-traders on the East coast and in the interior, as Europeans were on the West coast. But upon this subject I cannot dwell further.

In the past, I suggest, African society has not been static; modifications in custom and law, new customs and new laws, have come into being through the pressure of individuals; and, furthermore, enormous changes have taken place through the impact of invaders upon the indigenous peoples and their culture. No doubt there was much stagnation; but the impression one gets from a study of the past is an impression of movement, of the building up and breaking down of kingdoms, of cultural change. Throughout it all the African shows himself susceptible to stimulus, adaptable. If he is not gifted with great powers of spontaneous creation, he is capable of much under proper excitation.

Nothing in the past can compare with the upheaval that is now taking place under the pressure of western civilization. The pressure is not new. I suppose it began soon after 1415 when the Portuguese took possession of Ceuta on the Barbary Coast. Within my own lifetime it has gone on with ever accelerating intensity.

No part of the continent is exempt from European domination. At one time it was little more than a hunting-ground for slaves whose labour fed the growing economic necessities of Europe and America; now it is realized that the material prosperity of Europe at least depends upon the exploitation of Africa's mineral and agricultural resources. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald could once say—with some zoological inaccuracy, but

with perfect economic truth—that “not a sparrow can fall in Central Africa without affecting the destinies of our people at home”.

The White man has dug himself in. His numbers—outside the extreme north and the extreme south—are still relatively small; but he is energetic, pushful, resourceful, and wields a power that is altogether disproportionate to his numbers.

Moreover, the White man, of whatever nationality, has deliberately set himself to change African life so as to bring it more into accordance with his own ideas.

He is doing it in three ways. First, by direct exercise of his authority. He promulgates new laws in the place of certain African customary laws which he regards as being repugnant to natural justice, equity and good government. Second, by creating conditions which upset the delicate balance between the individual and the community. There is always, as I have said, a tension in African society, the community restraining with difficulty—and not always with success—the instinctive impulses of the individual. Generally speaking, the effect of western civilization has been to weaken that social control and liberate the individual; not always to the advantage of himself or of the community, seeing that the individual is deficient in self-control.

This is a side of my subject that I would fain dwell upon if space allowed.

In Carl Jung's latest work, *The Integration of the Personality*, he speaks of what he calls the process of individuation, of the escape from fateful identity with the group soul. “Since life can only exist in the forms of living units, which is to say of individuals, the law of life in the last analysis always tends towards a life that is individually lived.” A man is placed face to face with final moral decisions without which he could never attain consciousness and become a personality.

Jung points out the inevitable dangers of the transition. The problems of the inner voice calling upon a man to be the captain of his soul are full of hidden pits and snares. "It is tragic that the demon of the inner voice should spell greatest danger and indispensable help at the same time. It is tragic, but logical."

"The gigantic catastrophes," says Jung in a memorable passage, "that threaten us are not elemental happenings of a physical or biological kind but are psychic events. . . . Instead of being exposed to wild beasts, tumbling rocks and inundating waters, man is exposed to-day to the elemental forces of his own psyche. Psychic life is a world-power that excels by many times all the powers of the earth."

If this is true of ourselves, it is certainly no less true of the Africans. I have claimed that in the indigenous society the individual is never entirely lost in his group: men can and do think for themselves and act for themselves—within limits. The whole tendency to-day is in the direction of removing restraints upon individuals. A young man elects to leave home to work hundreds of miles away upon a European farm or mine; he receives wages as an individual; he pays tax as an individual; the control of his society upon his conduct is lessened—is perhaps entirely removed while he is absent—and loses its force; if he marries he finds the necessary cattle out of his own earnings instead of relying upon the obligation of his clansmen or kinsmen to contribute them.

We can measure some of the social results of this process; but who can measure the conflicts that go on in the man's psyche?

Not the least revolutionary change brought about by western civilization lies in the fact that it has created the conditions that make possible—and inevitable—this psychic crisis.

In the third place, western civilization is endeavouring to build up a new system in the room of the old system which it has so largely undermined or destroyed.

It would be easy to paint a picture of the devastating effects of western civilization upon African life. It would be a true picture; but not wholly true if it omitted the efforts being made to repair old blunders and to erect a new structure on a stable basis.

Europeans are busily exploiting the material resources of the continent—digging into the bowels of the earth for precious minerals, farming the soil for cotton and many other agricultural products. In pursuit of their industrial aims they have built railways and roads; have made insistent demands for land and still more land, for labour and still more labour. They have done all this with scant consideration for the African's social life, for his physical and moral welfare. What, think you, is likely to be the result when 50 or 60 per cent., or even more, of the able-bodied men are absent from their homes for long periods—perhaps years?

Attention is now being largely focussed upon the nutrition of the African population. The publication of an important report by the Economic Advisory Council in 1939 shows how seriously the problem is now being faced.

The authorities have now awakened to a fact that was only too evident to many of us long ago: that the African people are under-nourished and badly nourished; they have too little food and their diet is ill-balanced, when judged by European and American standards.

Dr. Audrey Richards, as the result of her researches in Northern Rhodesia,<sup>1</sup> agrees that under old conditions the diet was insufficient and goes on to show that the position is worsened under the new conditions. A diet which may have been thought adequate—but was not—

<sup>1</sup>*Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia.*

to the old village existence is plainly not sufficient to allow the African to advance or to adapt himself to the new industrial and agricultural conditions. Men who may have worked intermittently three or four hours a day in their reserves are now asked to do a regular eight or ten hours under white supervision on the big plantations and mines. Mining companies are learning that they may have to give not only twice as much food as their labourers had at home but must also provide a better balanced diet. Apart from labourers, there is the population as a whole. It is an unfortunate fact that the diet has deteriorated among many of the people. The sudden development of industrialization has led to a lightning growth of the town populations, where too often they are herded in slums that beggar description, are cut off from contact with their land and live in extreme poverty. The new use of European foods, white flour or polished rice, has robbed them of many of the most valuable constituents of their former diet. In rural districts the situation is no less alarming. "In many parts of Africa the natives are trying to produce the same amount of food as they did formerly from lands that have been cut down to a fraction of their original size, and are thus heavily over-stocked and often badly eroded.

"The male labour supply of tribes in many rural areas of Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and the Union has been halved by constant migration to and from the mines and the towns, and in such cases agricultural production has inevitably decreased. The desire for money and European goods has destroyed the old incentives to food production.

"Small wonder that the medical officers report that the physique of natives, whether in the town or the country, is actually deteriorating and that the proportion of definite malnutrition is on the increase."

The serious consequences of malnutrition have been catalogued by the Committee on Nutrition to which I have referred. The effects are seen in definite deficiency diseases, and also in general ill-health and lowered resistance to infection, inefficiency of labour in industry and agriculture, maternal and infantile mortality and a general lack of well-being. The fundamental cause of malnutrition is the low standard of living.

The problem is essentially economic; yet involves many factors that are not economic but psychological. In solving it education must play its part—education in a broad sense—in overcoming innate conservatism, prejudice, ignorance of dietetics, religious scruples and tabus.

It is a question that vitally concerns the missionary societies and the building of the Christian Church in Africa.

Happily the governments in British Africa are now alive to the immense importance of this and other problems.

The decision of the Imperial Government in 1940 to spend up to 50 million pounds during the next five years on promoting the welfare of the Colonial peoples committed to its trusteeship is a welcome sign that we are serious in our determination to fulfil the obligations of that trusteeship.<sup>1</sup>

It is only one sign.

In recent years there has been a great extension of what is called Indirect Rule; which means that the management of their own local affairs is being placed more and more in the hands of the African peoples. They are being encouraged to develop the best elements in their own culture and to graft upon them such elements in our

<sup>1</sup>In 1945 Parliament increased this provision to £120,000,000 spread over ten years; one million a year to be set aside for necessary research.

culture as will strengthen, fructify, energize their own institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Governments and Missions are collaborating in education.

Missions are a sociological factor of the first importance in the present development. Religion has always been a regulative force in African society and nothing causes more alarm to the friends of Africa than to watch the inevitable breakdown of that religion in modern conditions. To replace the old by a new and stronger religious basis to African society is the sociological function of the Missions.

That large numbers of Africans have, as a matter of fact, not only been stimulated intellectually but also gained a new religious motive, is, I think, one of the most hopeful features of the situation.

## 5

In his presidential address to the British Association in 1929 Mr. Jan Hofmeyr described Africa as a great laboratory in which experiments are being conducted that will have their effect upon mankind throughout the world. Nothing like it has ever before taken place. What is going on in that laboratory? In other words: what are the sociological and psychological results of the contact of White and Black in Africa? We want to know the strains and stresses to which the culture of the Africans is being subjected, to assess if possible the

<sup>1</sup>It is sometimes alleged that the Native Authorities, into whose hands local government is entrusted, are "museum pieces" which must be carefully preserved in their original form. "Conformity with tradition," writes Sir Bernard Bourdillon, late Governor of Nigeria, "is not an end in itself. It is merely the means (and generally the most effective one) of securing the main aim—that of acceptability to the people themselves. . . Native authorities must be dynamic in form and not static: they must be living organisms and not fossils." *Africa*, July, 1945, p. 123.



resultant acceptances, adaptations and resistances to the processes of change, and to discover the nature of the emerging new culture—the *tertium quid*.

This is not an academic subject. For all who are interested in racial questions—and particularly for missionaries and officials concerned with Africa—it is a subject of the most urgent and immediate practical importance. The realization of the need has called into being a new kind of anthropology: the study of modern culture contact; what in U.S.A. is called acculturation.

As far as Africa is concerned the leading role in this development has been played by the International African Institute.

The initiative in founding it was taken by a group of missionaries and their friends. We were convinced that the welfare of Africa would increasingly depend on international co-operation, that the problems could only be effectively studied on an international basis. We desired to bring about a closer association between scientific knowledge and research on the one hand and the practical interests of the administrator, educator, missionary and colonist on the other, so that science might make an increasingly effective contribution to the solution of the problems confronting us all. As we explored the situation we became convinced that anthropological research as hitherto carried on was not adequate to the new conditions. It was generally—shall I say?—too antiquarian; it looked too exclusively at the African-as-he-was before western culture impinged upon him. The changes that are taking place are just as much sociological facts as anything in the old life of Africa; and equally need to be—and are capable of being—studied scientifically. Unless we know what is happening, not only in the outer world of social organization but also in the inner world of the African's mind, all our efforts to

work for, and with, the African are so much groping in the dark.

Here is a tremendous fact which the humanist must sit down and study with the same humility and seriousness as a scientist would study any other fact. It is the fact of the African-as-he-is in a state of transition.

That was what we set out to do. After some years of effort we can claim to have demonstrated that research work of this kind can be at once of high scientific importance and of great practical value to all nations interested in Africa.

Not the least valuable result has been the help and stimulus given to other organizations in the same direction.

We selected and trained men and women of various nationalities—17 Fellows in all (two of them engaged in linguistic research), and in addition Studentships to the number of 15 were granted to missionaries and officials to enable them to fit themselves better for their work. Grants have also been given to other research workers. All this has been done in addition to the linguistic work which the Institute has fostered and carried on.

A long series of notable works has already been issued and others are on the way. These books have proved both the need and the value of the Institute's programme. There is every prospect that the Institute will have a great work still to do.

The British government is now keenly alive to the value of scientific research as a basis for Colonial planning. A large number of expert committees is at work upon the various problems, medical, ecological, social. This is another of the most hopeful factors in the present situation.

## Chapter Four

### THE SEXUALITY OF THE AFRICAN

#### 1

SOME will remember that the African Section of the Tambaram Council asked the International Missionary Council to undertake or foster research into the subject of polygamy and related social customs.

Insistence on monogamy—they declared, and it is a well-known fact—is one of the great bars preventing the entrance of men into the Christian Church. "In some areas men brought up in a Christian atmosphere are reverting to polygamy and other social customs, and declare that these bring to them no sense of guilt, no pricking of conscience. The question is raised as to whether monogamy is essential to Christianity or is merely a factor in European civilization—whether in the practice of polygamy there is something radically incompatible with a vital faith in Christ, and living of a true life in fellowship with Him."

I welcome that request for an inquiry; and am glad to know that the International Missionary Council will undertake it if the funds are forthcoming.

It is not necessary to be a follower of Freud to discern the important part that sex plays in African life. Of all the subjects that the practical man—and particularly the missionary—needs to be proficient in, this is perhaps pre-eminent.

I suppose that at least eighty per cent. of the cases that come before the magistrates and Native Tribunals are related to sex. The difference between African and

Christian conceptions of sexual morality constitutes probably the missionary's greatest difficulty. Some educationists profess to observe an arrest of mental development in African adolescents and ascribe it to obsession by sex.

There is, I repeat, no subject that the missionary needs more fully to understand. It has not hitherto received that close study which it demands. Some people fight shy of it. When the *Ila-speaking Peoples* was first published, an eminent Anglican bishop, who was also a medical man and had had a long and varied career in Central Africa, asked for a bowdlerized version because, said he, he could not possibly put it into the hands of the ladies of his Mission—and indeed there were few of the men he could trust with it—on account of the frankness with which sexual matters were discussed. Happily, such an obscurantist attitude is a thing of the past.

Sex dominates almost every aspect of African culture; and no man, no woman, who lives among Africans can afford to ignore it. We should look at the facts with open eyes, not turn our heads and refuse to see them. We should not approach the subject with a shudder nor lose ourselves in mere reprobation; but study it sympathetically, with an earnest desire to understand the African's point of view. If we do that, we shall find, I am sure, much that will win our approbation.

## 2

The question has been debated whether the sex impulse is stronger in Africans than in Europeans. We have, so far as I know, no data upon which to base an unprejudiced judgment.

Whether it be weaker or stronger, it is there; and, as in ourselves, it needs to be controlled. As Dr. Malinowski truly observes, it has been the source of

most trouble in the world from Adam and Eve onwards. It is the cause of most tragedies, whether we meet them in present-day activities, in past history, in myth, or in literary production. It is ready to upset all other interests at all times; left to itself it tends constantly to work upon and loosen all existing bonds. This impulse, absorbing and pervading as it is, would thus destroy any budding form of association, would create chaos from within and would invite dangers from without.

Human society is possible only on the condition that this impulse—and other impulses—are brought under control.

Now in Africa we find, not loose congeries of individuals, but organized communities. This implies, of course, the presence and operation of certain ideals, restraints, public opinion, laws, regulative mechanism. Nowhere is conduct left to unchartered freedom: everywhere there is a more or less rigid system of control by society over the innate tendencies of its members. And in this matter of sex particularly, a state of absolute promiscuity is nowhere to be found in Africa, not even in the rudest of tribes. If we were to believe some people we should conclude that Africans were all lewd folk, a-moral or un-moral or immoral, destitute of respect for external authority and with no voice of conscience within. That is utterly a false view. Mr. Victor Murray is much nearer the truth when he declares that "the restraint that the so-called 'savage' can and does put upon his sexual impulses at certain seasons through loyalty to tribal custom is one of the most remarkable things about the make-up of primitive man".<sup>1</sup>

That African society does not succeed in completely controlling riotous impulses is true. It succeeds no more—perhaps less—than we do. But the very presence of the conflict between ideals and hot blood testifies to

<sup>1</sup>A. Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush* (1929), p. 84.

the existence of an ideal and of a restraining mechanism.

I do not deny that in some respects the ideals are lower than our own. I believe that in other respects they are higher than our own.

Let us recognize that Africans are engaged in a desperate struggle—the same that we ourselves are engaged in. How relatively uncivilized people attempt to cope with a problem that afflicts all mankind—ourselves included—ought to be of interest to all of us.

## 3

Quite obviously men and women must reproduce themselves if the tribe is to maintain its existence. On the other hand, sexual promiscuity is contrary to the paramount interest of the tribe: it is destructive of society. It might seem that the continuance of the tribe could be secured by the birth of children without any regard to the manner of their birth. But more is required than a constant supply of new members of the community. Children must be cared for and disciplined.

It might be argued that the need would be met by treating women and children as common property and by establishing public nurseries. But Africans do not believe it. Their institutions prove that they do not believe it.

Everywhere in Africa the family exists: the biological group which comprises father, mother and children. This is the primary cell of the social organism; and the most important. It is of supreme social value. As Dr. Malinowski well says: "it is the very workshop of cultural development."<sup>1</sup> Around it is built an exceedingly strong sentiment.

It means that a man acknowledges his responsibilities

<sup>1</sup>*Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927), p. 219.

in regard to the children he has begotten. He does not simply yield to his sexual impulse and evade the consequences; he stays by the mother and their offspring; he protects them; he works for them; he exercises authority over them.

I grant you that in the details there are differences between the African family and ours. The father's relation to his children may not always be precisely what our relation is to our children. In a patriarchal society, his power over the children may be well-nigh absolute. Where society is matriarchal; where children belong to the mother's group, not the father's, and where descent is reckoned through the mother; the mother's brother is the natural guardian of her children, and, in principle at least, the father is not responsible for them. But everywhere, whether in patriarchal or matriarchal society, the father is still the father; and as such is linked with his children by an indissoluble tie.

There may be such variations; but fundamentally the family remains the family, with like affection and mutual obligations as prevail among ourselves.

The institution of the family is the chief means of regulating the sexual impulse. It makes a natural instinct subserve the interests of the community. It implies marriage and recognition of the principle of legitimacy.

The community takes steps to invest marriage with sanctity. The mere physical union of male and female is one thing: marriage is another.

We shall see that a very large measure of liberty is commonly allowed, so large indeed that among some tribes it approximates to promiscuity. Having succeeded—or at least having attempted success—in securing its all-important end, African society is largely tolerant in other directions. But everywhere marriage is accompanied by ceremonial and tabus which mark the com-

munity's sense of the social value of the institution. It is not simply—or even mainly—that the mutual affection of two young people receives public approval and encouragement. Marriage is intended for the procreation of new members of the community: so we say in our habitual terms. But it means more than that to Africans. We have always to keep in mind that the African community includes both the living and the so-called dead. There is no separation between its visible and ordinarily invisible members. The living are constantly passing into the ranks of the so-called dead; the so-called dead are as constantly returning to the ranks of the living by reincarnation. They return—if I may so put it—in orderly manner through the legitimized union of two members of the living section of the community.

To ensure this regular return the living section ordain who shall, and who shall not be, the parents; they signify their approval and seek the approval of the invisible members; and they take steps to secure the well-being of the child, both before and after its birth.

The community, I say, ordains who shall and who shall not marry. Marriage is not so much the affair of two individuals as the concern of the groups to which they belong. But I do not suggest that no regard is paid to the wishes of the young people. African youths and maidens—like all others—fall in love; and youth generally finds means of getting its own way.

Among many African tribes the consent of the girl is absolutely necessary to a marriage. The Chaggas regard it as unseemly for a father to choose his daughter's husband. Kikuyu women say: "We never marry anyone we do not want to marry." And I imagine other women say the same.

But this is not a universal rule. Infant betrothal is of frequent occurrence. Sometimes a girl will find herself at maturity engaged to a man old enough to be her



grandfather, perhaps a hoary old polygamist; and if, as is likely, she has formed an attachment with a youth of her own age, there is tragedy. Many girls are undoubtedly forced into loveless marriages; and I know from my own experience that they strongly resent it. It is not unknown that such girls commit suicide.

Custom often allows women to form liaisons with men whom they prefer before their legal husbands. A regularized system of *cicisbeism*—that is, of socially recognized sexual liaison outside the bonds of legal marriage—is prevalent in some quarters.

The elementary right of a woman to select the father of her children is, we may say, nowhere in Africa admitted without exception. Freedom of choice, whether by young people on their own behalf or by their families for them, is severely limited.

This applies not only to regular marriage but also to extra-nuptial relations. There is here, naturally, ample scope for conflict between individual desire and traditional custom which represents the established order of things. Human passion over-rides all laws at times—in Africa as elsewhere. Not even the supreme tabu which we call incest is invariably observed.

I cannot enumerate in detail all the various restrictions which custom imposes.

There may be tribal endogamy which forbids inter-marriage between two neighbouring and entirely friendly tribes. There may be class distinctions within a tribe: a freewoman may not marry a slave; a family of blacksmiths may only intermarry with another family of blacksmiths; and so on. Other impediments are of a eugenic nature—or what Africans regard as eugenic. In general we may say that before approving a marriage, the elders take physique and character into consideration. In some tribes the young men are expected to prove their fitness for marriage by performing feats of

courage or endurance. The severe tests ordinarily administered during the initiation ceremonies subserve this purpose. If the cowardice of a youth became known outside the precincts of the camp—and such things do get bruited abroad—the girls would scorn him.

Incidentally, I would remark, these requirements of tested valour and strength present a problem for the administrator and missionary. The idea that young men should prove their mettle before being accepted as fathers of the new generation is excellent. But in some tribes this involved homicide: the young warrior could not marry until he had brought home the head of an enemy of the tribe; and British law is not sympathetic to such proceedings. Moreover, it has become impossible in some regions for young men to show valour and skill in battle and in the hunting of wild animals. To find equivalent substitutes is not easy. In the native territories of South Africa, we are told, the young men who are adored by the girls are those who go off to work in the gold-mines and return to swank about in their finery. It seems a poor substitute for the reckless adventures of the old days; but it may be better than nothing in keeping up the spirit of the race.

From women a different set of qualities is required. Africans have their own ideas of feminine beauty—which do not always tally with our own—and unquestionably the handsomest girls are most sought after. Besides beauty a man looks for skill in cooking, for charming manners, and a capacity for hard work. A woman may—as among the Lango—subject her prospective daughter-in-law to various domestic tests. She is invited to assist in the housework and given some sense to roast, the while the older woman busies herself out-of-doors. After a time she calls the girl to her, complaining of some dust or a fly that has got into her eye. The girl comes near to blow out the obstruction;

and the woman catches her breath and can tell whether the girl tasted or smelled the sense to see whether it was cooked. If she tasted it, she presumes that the girl is a spendthrift and would be wasteful of her husband's food. Other tests are applied; and should the girl not come up to standard the proposed marriage is abandoned.

There are indications, therefore, that marriage is to a considerable extent a matter of deliberate selection. The fittest man for the fittest woman: that at any rate is the ideal.

## 4

Africans, like ourselves, have tables, but unwritten, of Kindred and Affinity "wherein whosoever are related are forbidden . . . to marry together". And their tables are longer and more complicated than ours. The fundamental rule is that persons must not mate in whose veins the same blood runs. But Africans have their own ideas about consanguinity; and these do not always tally with our own.

In East Africa a form of vaccination against small-pox is a common indigenous practice: the serum is conveyed from one person to another by bringing into contact the pustule on one arm with the scarified wound on the other. It is a rule that marriage is barred between the families of two such persons, on the ground that their blood has intermingled. Mr. Driberg told me of an interesting parallel from Belgium. A girl's life was saved by transfusion of her fiancé's blood into her veins; and thereafter the priest intervened to forbid their marriage on the ground of consanguinity.

Similarly, marriage is frequently prohibited between the children of men who have entered into a covenant of brotherhood by mingling their blood—their actual blood. Participation in the actual fluid is interpreted as participation of blood in a mystical sense.

Where totemism prevails, even in a degenerate state, there is supposed to be a consanguineous relation between the totem-animal and all members of the clan which bears its name. If you ask a clansman whether he eats the totem he will reply with a gesture of horror: "What! eat my brother!" Eating flesh and sexual commerce are equally a mingling of substance; and they are equally prohibited when the animal is the totem and the woman is a member of the clan: the one is a brother, the other is a sister. When a man meets a female stranger and feels an interest in her, he asks: "What is your totem?" And if it proves to be the same as his, he knows that he must treat her as a sister.

I say that in some respects the rules governing the choice of a mate in Africa are often more strict than our rules. We do not prohibit marriage between cousins—though such marriages are not regarded with favour by some people—nor do we draw any distinction in this matter between what are called cross-cousins and ortho-cousins. Africans do draw distinctions here; they prohibit what we allow, and enjoin what we are indifferent to.

In olden times, for example, before the influence of western culture was felt, the Ashanti would have put to death any man who had intercourse with his mother's sister's child; but they would allow him to marry his mother's brother's child. This was quite logical from their point of view; since the one woman has the same blood as the man and the other has not. The *mogya*, the "blood", is inherited only through the mother. Cross-cousins are generally allowed, and even encouraged, to marry in Africa; while the marriage of ortho-cousins is disallowed. If there are exceptions to this rule, it is mostly in the direction of prohibiting all sexual relations between cousins. It was not unknown that infraction of the law was punishable by death. We may have pre-

judices against such inter-breeding; but we do not send offenders to the gallows.

It is of the utmost importance, surely, that we recognize that Africans have their rules on these subjects; and that the rules are not arbitrary but based upon certain definite principles.

Incest is the great tabu. It is commonly put on the same level as witchcraft. Incest and witchcraft are the supreme anti-social sins in the African's eyes.

Africans share with ourselves in this horror of incest. Any sexual relationship between members of the close biological group—introducing emotional reactions which are completely incompatible with familial sentiment—would break up the family. Anything which detracts from the pre-eminent social value of the family is met by the community's most indignant reprobation.<sup>1</sup>

And the connotation of *umbulo* (to use the Xhosa term) is much wider than that of "incest". Monica Hunter tells of two young Pondos who were very much in love but who were forbidden to marry because the elders discovered that the girl's maternal grandmother was of the same clan as the boy.<sup>2</sup>

The family is a school of behaviour. The children learn how to conduct themselves towards their elders and contemporaries: towards their parents, brothers and sisters, in the first place; then toward the kindred with whom they come into contact; and finally towards people outside the family group.

Here lies the significance of those tables of relationship which occupy so large a space in our ethnographical records and look so bewildering to students on first

<sup>1</sup>"In any type of civilization in which customs, morals and law would allow incest, the family could not continue to exist. . . . The alternative type of culture under which incest is precluded is the only one consistent with the existence of social organization and culture."—B. Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>2</sup>*Reaction to Conquest* (1936), p. 184.

examination. These tables set out fully the terms by which people address or refer to kinsmen and in-laws. As they learn these terms the boys and girls learn also the behaviour proper to each particular relationship. Particularly in regard to sex, behaviour is not uniform.

Let me take an example.

The position in which I stand towards the wife of my wife's brother is strictly defined by the word *mukongwana*<sup>1</sup> which we apply to each other. Other people are included in that term: the co-wives of my *mukongwana*, the daughters of all her brothers, her own sisters, the wives of other brothers of my wife, and so on. Towards all these women I know exactly how I am expected to behave. And I know the reason. When I married, certain cattle were transferred from my family to my wife's family; and some—or all—of these cattle are used in getting a wife for one of my wife's brothers. Towards this woman who is thus brought into our group I must conduct myself in a fitting manner; and must behave in the same way towards the many other women in her group who have apparently nothing to do with those cattle. We are conscious of a tie that binds us. We know how to behave one to another. I must avoid intimacy with any of these women: in their presence I assume an attitude of shyness; I address each one as "you", not "thou"; I never ask food of any of them. I must never make the slightest allusion to sexual matters within their hearing. If quite unwittingly I should come upon one of them bathing in the river, I would be overwhelmed with shame and would send her a present to expiate my serious fault.

All this means that society draws a line of separation between me and these women. I may be attracted by any one of them; but I must repress my desires. In this

<sup>1</sup>This is the word used by the Thonga of South Africa. See H. A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*.

way the rule which makes the person of my sister inviolable is extended to cut off from me a number of other women who are in no sense blood-relations.

But if traditional custom debars me in one direction it opens up paths in other directions. It is not everywhere the same, but in some parts of Africa, for example, the younger unmarried sisters of my wife are on an entirely different footing from my *bakongwana*. I may joke with them, eat with them, flirt with them and if one of them bears a child of my begetting it is no serious matter; I shall marry her legally and my wife will be quite pleased.

Here—as you will see at once—is the source of much trouble in the Church. English law allows marriage with a deceased wife's sister but outside of wedlock any intercourse with her would be adultery. But many Africans fail entirely to see anything wrong in it. As one missionary writes: "The persistence of this pattern in the Native mind is so great that one of the frequent offences for which Church discipline has to be applied is adultery with a younger sister of the wife."

## 5

I turn now to consider the ways in which African society emphasizes and enhances the status of marriage other than by imposing restrictions.

Marriage has a positive social value in that it contributes to the well-being of the community by forming a fresh group, which ideally at least is intended to be permanent and within which fresh members of the community will be brought into being and receive training. Society therefore invests marriage with solemnities. These mark public approval; they arouse in the parties concerned a sense of their obligations; they symbolize a new status for the young people, a status that is now publicly announced. They are now man and woman in

the full sense of the term—or at least they will be so when the marriage proves fruitful.

A wedding is not merely a jollification—though it is that. I wish it were possible to analyse in detail the functions of the marriage rites, so rich in their symbolism. The long-drawn-out preliminary discussions by members of the two families; the bride's reluctancies, real and simulated; the entry of the bride into her new home—all these things are of great interest. I will only refer to two details.

First: certain acts which symbolize the union. At an Ila wedding bride and bridegroom sit face to face with a plate of thick porridge between them; she breaks off a morsel, dips it into relish and gives it to her man; and he then does the same to her. This beautiful ceremony is eloquent in suggestion of the true nature of marriage: eating together means union in the close friendship of equals; the exchange of bread signifies mutual service.

There are analogous acts among other tribes: here, an exchange of saliva (a part of themselves) in a cup of milk; here a mutual anointing; here drinking milk together; and so on.

The second thing I refer to is the definite place that religion takes—often, if not always—in these marriage rites. The invisible members of the community are vitally concerned in the marriage; and their blessing is sought upon it. Prayers and offerings often therefore form part of the ceremony.

There are features of these African rites that I could wish were adopted by the African Church. Instead of the ring and wedding-cake of European custom, why should we not consecrate the African customs of eating and drinking together? Or if there must be a ring, let it be additional to the meal.



## 6

Personally, I should like to see another African custom frankly adopted by the Church—adopted with perhaps some modification. I mean the widely prevalent custom of transferring certain goods from the bridegroom's family to the bride's family. *Ukulobola* is the name for it in some South African tribes; and it is conveniently described as *lobola*<sup>1</sup> by writers on the subject.

In the past, missionaries have in general frowned upon the practice of *lobola*—many of them, perhaps the majority, still do so. For them it is a bargain, a purchase and a sale, a heathen custom incompatible with enlightened Christian feelings. There is, they say, no way of purifying it or of lifting it up to higher levels of morality. In some quarters, the Church forbids it and puts under discipline any members who receive or give cattle or other goods when their children marry. I am convinced they are wrong. I would adopt it and endeavour to remove certain objectionable features from it.

I was much impressed by a communication I received from an educated African. He had married without *lobola* a woman of another tribe. When he went to live for a time among his wife's people he had opportunities of comparing the respect for marriage among them and among his own people. His people had long ago, under missionary influence, abandoned the custom; and, he confessed, their estimate of marriage had sadly deteriorated; it was not nearly so high as among his wife's people who had retained *lobola*. He was deeply impressed by this fact; and proposed—being a trained

<sup>1</sup>This is a conventional term adopted by social anthropologists, though not in strict accordance with Bantu rules of word formation: some writers prefer *lobolo*. The complete word in Zulu and Xhosa is *ukulobola*.

anthropologist in the functional school of Dr. Malinowski—to study the functions of *lobola* in the various South African tribes. Needless to say, I warmly encouraged him.

The missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church among the Kgatla of Bechuanaland forbade Church members to practise the custom. When the Chief, Lentswe, became a Christian he acquiesced at first in the prohibition and extended it to non-Christians. But after fifteen years of experience of the effect, having found that the abolition of *lobola* (*bogadi*, they call it in Bechuanaland) had led to confusion and to a weakening of the marriage tie, he revived the custom. In 1927 the Church authorities agreed to recognize it as consistent with Christian morality; and since then *bogadi* has been an essential part of marriage for both Christian and non-Christian Kgatla.<sup>1</sup> Such recognition is surely better than merely winking at a clandestine practice which *lobola* has become in many Christian communities where it is officially banned.

We know that both in the character and quantity of goods transferred, the custom varies considerably. The precise significance of the custom may also vary. It varies according to the form of the local currency. It varies also according to whether the society is patriarchal or matriarchal. Among pastoral tribes cattle to the number of twenty, or even 100, are handed over. Cowrie-shells; arrows and glass beads; pots of honey; puncheons of gin, perhaps to the value of as much as £500—all these things figure in descriptions of the custom. Instead of goods, labour may be given: perhaps the suitor works for his father-in-law seven years, from the day of betrothal till the first child can crawl. Some

<sup>1</sup>I. Schapera, *Married Life in an African Tribe* (1940), pp. 84 *seqq.* This principle has always been followed also by the Church of Scotland in Nyasaland and marriage witnesses have to affirm publicly that the *chuma* has been properly arranged to the satisfaction of all parties,

tribes commonly exchange women instead of transferring goods.

Africanists are not yet agreed upon the precise significance of the custom. They have called the transferred goods various names: bride-price, head-money, dowry, marriage-settlement, earnest, indemnity, bride-wealth, equilibrium guarantee; and have variously described it as "a gift to seal the contract"; "a recompense to the bride's parents"; "compensation for the loss of the woman's services"; "a purchase-price"; "economic security for the permanence of the union"; "a pledge that the duties as husband and wife shall be fulfilled"; "a guarantee that the woman shall be fairly treated"; "validation of a legal marriage".

It is very doubtful whether we have as yet fully understood what *ukulobola* is in the mind of Africans themselves; perhaps we shall never understand it fully so long as we persist in thinking of it in our categories.

Of one thing practically all—but not quite—who have studied it are agreed about: *ukulobola* is not a purchase of a woman. Africans do not—as they have so frequently been accused—buy wives. If you were to suggest to an African woman that she was *muntu muule*, "a bought person", she would be most indignant. We should dismiss the notion finally from our minds and with it the commonly used term "bride-price". Nothing perhaps is more injurious to the reputation of the Africans: it lowers them in the estimation of the civilized world.

It is true that, unfortunately, some Africans have come to regard *ukulobola* as no more than a commercial transaction. White men have, for upwards of a century, been telling them that they buy wives; and they have come to believe it. But chiefly it is the spread of a more materialistic and commercial attitude coming in with money that is leading to the degradation of the custom.

Money is used as a substitute for cattle. Instead of relying upon his family to provide the cattle necessary, a young man goes off to the mines and brings back £25 or £50 which he hands over to his bride's family instead of five or ten head of cattle. He may call the bank-notes "oxen", but the fiction cannot hide the fact that the character of the business has changed. As Monica Hunter says: "With the decay of the ancestor cult and the substitution of money the religious significance of *ukulobola* goes."

This is a change that we should do all in our power to resist.

Mr. Soga, an African pastor who has written two excellent books on his own people, the Xhosa, declares that *Ukulobola* is the Bantu woman's charter of freedom. Perhaps no better mechanism could have been devised under the old conditions for the protection of married women. And so long as the women feel it necessary to have such a guarantee of good treatment I am confident we should maintain the custom. Maintain it, yes, but there are features that might well be reformed.

Readers of my book, *The Mabilles of Basutoland*, will remember how strong was the feeling of those eminent missionaries against the custom. Mrs. Mabile, born and bred among the Basuto and knowing them better perhaps than any other European, used to say: a woman married with cattle is never free; the death of her husband renders her position more intolerable still; she is the slave, the property of all the men of her husband's family. Here is the worst feature of the custom. The woman is bound by the contract—which perhaps she has no share in making—so long as the cattle remain in the possession of her family. The death of the husband does not release her among the Basuto; she passes with the rest of the property to the heir. This was not entirely a disadvantage. It meant that no widow was ever left

unprotected. But the woman might be forced—and often was—into a union which was utterly repugnant to her. If her people sent back the cattle, she was free; but if they did not, she had no remedy in law.

I agree with Mr. H. P. Junod that the custom could be, and should be, reformed in this direction. I would have the Church frankly recognize *ukulobola* with the provision that at the death of the husband the widow should be completely free. The cattle would remain in her family's possession for her support. This indeed is the custom among some African tribes: the widow is free to marry whom she pleases and without the return of the *lobola*.<sup>1</sup>

## 7

I believe, then,—as I have tried to show—that Africans have an ideal of what marriage should be.

Polygamy enters as a complication. This is too big a subject to be discussed here. I do not minimize its importance. But I would only say that in discussing it we should not lose our sense of proportion. Only a relatively small number of the men in any tribe have more than one wife. Economic forces are waging war against polygamy. There are indications—as my friend Torday pointed out—that monogamy is part of the African's ideal of marriage but never attained. When

<sup>1</sup>When discussing St. Paul's "rule" about women's covering their heads, Professor William Robinson wrote wise words which have a wider implication. "Of course, in the pursuit of this task as a missionary he (St. Paul) often had to fall below the level of what he conceived to be the ideal, when he was faced with situations which were so complex that there was no way out which would not have been a worse evil, except the laying down of a "rule" which would meet the situation for the time being. This was the case when dealing with the situation of prostitution which had invaded the Corinthian Church. It is the way every missionary has to go to work to-day. It is the only way anyone can work *in history*. . . . In the same way we must deal with every other missionary situation, interpreting it in the light of facts which create it."—*Expository, Times*, Dec. 1945, p. 60.

we see the revulsions in some Islamic countries against polygamy we can hope that in time Africans will rebel against it also: the education of women will tend in that direction.

In the meantime, the difficulty offered by polygamy to the Church is serious enough. But there are worse things than polygamy. I think the system of prostitution in our own countries is worse: and you would have to go far in Africa outside the new urban populations, to find anything quite like it. And whatever the evils of polygamy may be, it does at least save African society from the incubus of numbers of frustrated single women claiming for themselves a recognition of women's right to bear children. The Church has yet to face the question of the surplus of women in a monogamist African society.

I am not putting up an argument in favour of polygamy. I am only asking for careful study of all its implications. To many missionaries, it would seem, polygamy is Africa's public enemy No. 1. I am not so sure. I think that the system of concubinage, common in some Christian communities, is more repugnant, for it is hypocritical and clandestine.

When I suggest that Africans have an ideal of marriage I am not suggesting that they have realized their ideal. Far from it. All their efforts to make it permanent and stable are in vain. Elaborate marriage rites do not invariably impress upon the young people the solemnity of the step they are taking. Adultery is commonly punished by fines; sometimes it is punished with savage cruelty; but no penalties—not even the so-called magical sanctions—prevent adultery from being very prevalent. *Ukulobola* by no means always acts as a protection to the woman; the quarrels that come of it, especially where it is given by instalments, frequently disturb the peace of the community. The jealousies within a polygamist

household are so notorious that Africans have a special word to describe them.

I have this to add.

No one can study these matters without being struck by a paradox. On one hand you meet with such facts as these: the value often attached to virginity; certain rituals of a religious nature can only be performed by virgins—or perhaps by women who can no longer bear children: the insistence upon rigid continence in both men and women on certain occasions. When the warriors go out to fight, they must abstain from all sexual delights and the women who stay at home must do nothing to attract men.

The same rules apply when a company of men go out hunting, or to smelt iron ore. A doctor will keep free from women while preparing his medicines. There are reasons of a dynamistic nature for such tabus: the iron in the smelting kiln would fail to melt if any man or woman concerned were not to observe the tabu. On other occasions, the reason for continence in a husband is the well-being of his child and its mother: so all during the period of lactation which may extend two or three years, a man has no access to his wife; and some tribes would extend the period to cover all or most of the time of her pregnancy. Where limited intercourse is permitted, care has to be taken lest the woman conceive again while nursing her baby. In this respect African women are more fortunate than some of their white sisters who are expected to bring forth a child every year or so. I recall a picture in a New York paper of a family of 14 children, the eldest of whom was 21. Public opinion would be outraged if an African woman had one child a year or 18 months younger than its predecessor.

Here again is a question which the Church has to face in connexion with polygamy. Are we to insist upon rigid

continence for the Christian monogamist for the two years or more? Is the period of lactation to be reduced? Are our people to be taught—as some missionaries advocate—to use European contraceptive methods?

There are other occasions when the supposedly over-sexed Africans exercise restraint which perhaps we should not expect. I need not enumerate all the tabus. What do they signify?

We may imagine that they originated from the sentiment that attaches to the conjugal embrace and that has grown up in consequence of the social value of everything connected with the family. The sentiment is so powerful that men and women have come to believe that under certain circumstances their sexual commerce may have consequences far beyond the natural consequence—may, indeed, affect for good or evil the lives of other people.

Alongside this kind of restriction—what we might call a shrinking in dread from sexual intercourse—is the large measure of license given to young people before marriage. Pre-nuptial intercourse—at least of a restricted kind—is commonly permitted; it is thought to be conducive to the physical and moral well-being of the young people. These acts are carried on with the knowledge of the parents, even with their consent; but always subject to the conditions, first that the tabu on inter-relations between clansmen be observed; and that no untoward result follows. The girl must come to her husband technically at least *virgo intacta*.

The paradox I have described is resolved, I think, when we remember that sexual intercourse is not regarded by the Africans as being in itself an evil thing, a sin. It may have anti-social consequences and therefore must be controlled and restricted in the interests of the supreme social value—the family.

Uncultured Africans are not familiar with the name of



Freud, but sometimes they appear to act as if they were Freudians. They seem to realize the perils of over-repression which serves to deflect instinctive tendencies to obsessions, delusions and sometimes suicide. They give free play within bounds to the exercise of these primary tendencies, since such a course, they think, is far less dangerous to society than over-repression. But they do inhibit in the interest of the family.

I have but skimmed the surface of a very large and important subject. It is sufficient to show that in some vital respects the African and Christian sexual ethics differ considerably.

The Christian ethic insists upon monogamy; upon fidelity and chastity within marriage and it forbids pre-nuptial and extra-nuptial sexual relations. The African ethic allows polygamy and tolerates sexual relations outside marriage on condition that the family is not broken up.

The evident differences provide a host of problems for the administrator and missionary. Surely our first duty is to study and understand. Indiscriminate denunciation is out of place.

We should recognize that there is much ground which Christians and pagan Africans hold in common. We and they are engaged in an identical struggle to control the strongest of human impulses. They have not succeeded; nor have we. They have their ideals as we have ours. Their conceptions of sexual morality are not at all points coincident with ours. In some respects they are more rigid than we are; in other respects they are decidedly more lax.

We want to reform African customs after our Christian ideals. Surely our first step should be to reinforce all those elements in African society which make for moral stability. If we see a man trying to stop a hole in a dyke, our primary duty is not to argue about less

relevant matters, but to help in his efforts to shut out the sea which threatens to overwhelm the land.

I have tried to show that the African concentrates upon the family as the main buttress against immorality. That is his dyke. I think we should do everything in our power to strengthen that institution.

It is lamentable, but true, that the first effect of the introduction of western civilization is to cause greater sexual licentiousness. The things that we strike at in our blundering way are precisely the institutions that aim at controlling the sexual impulse. That impulse needs no encouragement; it is always eager to break through restraints; as soon as control is lessened it escapes in a torrent. "The heart eats what it desires; what is sought for it, it does not eat." This seems to be the motto of the young Africans to-day in many quarters.

Any experienced administrator or missionary will tell you of the deterioration of morals.

The tendency of the economic system that we are introducing so rapidly and so widely into Africa is to break up the family. You cannot remove fifty or seventy per cent. of the adult males from a community for prolonged periods without domestic disaster. It is bad for the men; it is worse for the women who are left behind; it is worst of all for the children who are deprived of their fathers' discipline.

I carry in mind the picture which the distinguished missionary and anthropologist, Dr. Junod, has drawn of the thousands of men shut up in the mines of the Transvaal and of the unnatural vice they practise—vice to which South African tribes were never given in old days.

From many parts of Africa we receive reports of the flocking of girls and women to the new towns, where they live on prostitution, and of the serious increase of venereal disease. Nobody more laments these conditions than the elders of the tribes themselves. They

see that the disruption of the family is ruining tribal discipline. This is only one symptom of what is taking place—a real revolution in ideas.

I come back to the conflict between collectivism and individualism to which I referred in the preceding chapter. Among ourselves there has been a growing tendency to discuss marriage from the point of view of the individual. This is a reaction from the ideology that looked upon marriage mainly from the point of view of society.

As Emil Brunner says, "this reaction was certainly not unjustified; for the violence done to individual personalities and to the personal character of marriage by the demands of the collective institutions, was so great that they could not but seem intolerable to a generation which had become more conscious of the individual and personal aspect of life than any previous generation". Marriage is primarily the personal concern of two human beings who love one another. That is our view. That is the view that we are actively promulgating among the Africans.

The Africans would agree with those in our generation who contend that the reaction to individualism has now gone too far, that the severance of marriage from the system of law and custom is wholly wrong. "Marriage, sex relations in general, is a matter which concerns not merely the two interested parties themselves, but the community as a whole; for it is the source of the nation's power, to watch over which is the duty of the guardians of the common weal".

Our Christian teaching emphasizes the individualistic side and breaks down that system of tabus which were society's mechanism for the restriction of individual impulses.

What our English constitutional lawyers call the rule of law implies that law is more concerned with the

individual and his security in the exercise of his rights than with the State and the vindication of its authority. The individual and his rights are primary. Administrators trained in English law, and missionaries trained in Christian theology, are both naturally inclined to carry their individualistic principles to Africa. They tend to see in African social structure only those elements that bear hardly upon the individual. Their first impulse is to condemn African customary law as tyrannical; they set to work to undermine it, to modify it, to abrogate it, in the interests of the individual.

We introduce and enforce our laws upon peoples who do not recognize the ethical grounds upon which those laws rest. We make crimes where Africans see none. We upset their minds in matters wherein their customs are not really reprehensible. We are in danger of doing more harm than good.

The root of much of our troubles is this: we expect the African individual to break away from social control and to control himself when he has no motive for controlling himself. We label the old tabus superstitious, irrational. We ridicule them, educate our pupils out of them. They may be all we say about them; but they did have some control over these people. What are you putting in their place?

## Chapter Five

### SOME ASPECTS OF AFRICAN RELIGION

#### 1

I NOW approach a subject of intense interest and of prime importance. It is not remote and academic. The most interesting thing about any man, be he white or black, is his religion. The faith of a people so far removed from ourselves in their manner of life as the Africans—the way in which that faith fashions and controls their conduct—this should in itself be an attractive subject of study. It becomes of vital importance to men and women who set out to serve the Africans and introduce to them what we believe to be a religion that will answer all their questionings and satisfy all their needs.

For every missionary one primary question must always be: In the old faith is there any preparation, anticipation, for and of the religion of Christ? Does it offer any avenue of approach? Is there anything to which I can appeal—any foundation upon which I can build? Is there any evidence that the Spirit of God has been opening a way for Christ through the attitudes and beliefs and practices of the Africans?

It is those questions which I shall attempt to answer.

On the threshold you may ask whether it is possible to speak of African religion, as if there were but one and not many religions in that vast continent.

Let me make it clear that when I speak of the African, I mean the pagan Negro and that I use the term to include various Negroid peoples such as the Bantu.

In this sense the Africans are divided up into a great

number of nations and tribes, speaking several distinct families of language. Among them there is considerable diversity in religious belief and practice—a diversity associated with (a) differences in physical environment; (b) stages of social and political development; and (c) the degree to which they have been affected by non-Negro influence and racial admixture.

In spite of these cultural diversities there is, I believe, an underlying identity in religion. I do not deny or minimize the differences you may find between the highly organized Yoruba or Baganda, with their hierarchy of gods, on the one hand; and the more simple peoples, on the other hand. But the difference is one of emphasis and development, not of essence.

There is sufficient identity to warrant our speaking of African religion.

I would call to mind here what I said in a previous chapter about not exaggerating the solidarity of an African tribe. It would be a mistake to imagine that within a tribe there is absolute unanimity of belief. Even if there be outward conformity with regard to ceremonial, there is not universal agreement in ideas.

Here lies the anthropologist's fallacy. Some of us spend many years in exploring the native mind; but not even the most pertinacious of us penetrate to the secret thoughts of every man and woman. Most of us reach conclusions after listening to a small number of people. We are apt to generalize from too few instances.

That there are what my late friend Levy-Bruhl called collective representations—group ideas—I do not deny. But there are inquiring minds in Africa which do not accept the generally prevalent notions. There are sceptics and agnostics in Africa. There are idealists and materialists; the introspective and non-introspective; the devoutly religious, the intermittently religious, the indifferently religious.

Every pioneer missionary must, I imagine, have met pagan Africans who are imaginative, enquiring, wistful, to whom the enigma of this painful earth is very evident.

M. Arbousset, one of the pioneer missionaries in Basutoland, tells of a man who, after hearing the Gospel for the first time, said this to him:

"I went out one misty day to herd my sheep in the mountains, and while I was there alone I asked myself many sad questions—sad, because I could not answer them. The stars; who has touched them with his hand? Upon what pillars do they rest? The mountain streams know no rest, they have no other law than to flow without stay, night and day they flow on. Who makes them flow like this? The clouds come and go and drop as water on the earth. Whence come they? Who sends them? Surely it is not the rain-doctors who give us rain; for how can they make it? The wind is nothing to my eyes; what is it in itself? Who brings it, makes it blow and groan and bellow so that it frightens us? Do I know how the corn grows? Who can have given the earth the cunning and power to produce it? I thought of myself. We all depart and the nation stays. Where do we go? So my heart, weary of questioning, failed within me. In its turn my conscience (literally, my diaphragm) arose and assailed me. 'So much wrong-doing on earth—and you!' I thought of things I had done and my conscience gnawed me till I could stand it no longer and I ran after my sheep, all trembling, seeking distraction."<sup>1</sup>

While, then, we try to get a general view of African religion, let us always bear in mind that there is this individual questioning and doubting and seeking.

At the same time let us not forget that we are not dealing with fortuitous conglomerations of individuals, but with organized communities in which each man and

<sup>1</sup>T. Arbousset et F. Daumas, *Relation d'un voyage d'exploration* (1842), pp. 243 *seqq.*

woman has a recognized status. There are ranks and grades; there are standards of conduct, customs and laws, a code of etiquette governing personal relations. In a word, there is an ordered existence.

It is the sociologist's business to find out the function of each inter-linked factor in maintaining that organized life. He does not ask whether the religion of the people is true or false. He asks: What is the function of religion in this society? What does it do?

I spent many years—the happiest years of my life—in Central Africa, among a people who, when I went amongst them, were scarcely touched by European influence. I was there as a missionary—a teacher; but first of all, as a learner.

Among such a people you see little external evidence of religion. You see nothing comparable to what you may see over the greater part of India and Ceylon. There is no temple; no idol. Instead of the white *dagobas*, *gopurams* lofty and sculptured, the spacious mosques, which you see on every hand in India and Ceylon, you may see nothing but a miniature hut or two with grass roofs; and you may easily miss the significance of them.

Many early missionaries were sadly disappointed by this want of external evidence of religion; too often they jumped to the conclusion that Africans had no religion to speak of, that there was no prepared soil for the seed of the Gospel. As one Mission put it: "The Church has a prodigious task before it in Africa. It finds nothing in the heathen systems into which to engraft it. . . . To subvert and supplant is its mission."<sup>1</sup>

And yet, as you get to know the Africans, you find religion everywhere; not as an organized cult separable from the rest of their life, but as part and parcel of it, all-pervasive, motivating, controlling, guiding, strengthening.

<sup>1</sup>"Missions in Africa", A.B.C.F.M. 1881.



The religion is not your religion, just as the morality, in some respects, is not your morality. But morality is there, as I showed in my last chapter; and religion is there. It may be difficult to say what is religious; it is almost impossible to say what is not religious. Religion is there as an attitude of the spirit—a reverence and a trust; as a cult; as an adoration and a worship; as a social bond, an organizing, architectonic force; as a concern with the supernatural; as in some sense a theology, a philosophy. From his religion, the African derives his social cohesion and his mental composure. I borrow the words from Dr. Oman. I cannot better them. And I do not hesitate to apply them to African religion.

## 2

One of the elements in African religion is usually known as Ancestor Worship. The term is very unsatisfactory; but let it serve.

If there is one universal article of the African's creed is the conviction that death is not the end of all things. What we call death is a stage of the human spirit's exis-

I have often stood at the graveside during a pagan and heard the farewell addressed to the deceased father, the person who has passed over. I found these strangely moving in their effect; I can never stop repeating them to myself when I stand at the graveside of a friend. *Ko chi ya! Kabashimwine tulapona kabotu.* "A good journey! Tell the one who has gone ahead of us that we are all in good health."

This does not mean that the man has gone to some far-distant, inaccessible bourne from which no man returns. He has not gone far; he is near at hand.

The essence of the whole matter, so far as Africans

are concerned, is that the community is composed of members who are in the body and of members who are out of the body: the so-called living, and the so-called dead. They are all living together as one community.

Even that statement falls short of the complete truth.

Many Africans believe in re-incarnation: the Ba-ila certainly do. My old friend Mungalo used to say to me: "I am Mungalo; and my grandfather was Mungalo; Mungalo came to be reborn and I am he." So a man may be his own grandfather!

There is therefore a constant coming and going between the two worlds; the seen world and the unseen world. Here we spend a few years and we pass through the various stages of mundane existence. And death is no more than passing on to another stage. The funeral rites are just what the rites of infancy and puberty and marriage are: rites that mark the transition from one grade to another and that give the necessary accession of internal power and outward status.

The disembodied spirit passes a stage in the unseen world and then returns to assume a new body within the family.

Nor does that exhaust the subject. It is hardly true to say that "dead" and "living" inhabit two distinct worlds: there is a sense in which the two worlds are one and the same. For—to resume the instance I have mentioned—my old friend Mungalo now sitting smoking a pipe with me, or sitting yonder under the eaves of his hut and carving a wooden spoon, is the Mungalo who lived here a hundred years ago and, furthermore, Mungalo is his *musedi*, his guardian spirit, shall we say, always accompanying him, guarding him, warning him of danger.

There is here some metaphysical subtlety. The spirit that assumes a material body is not confined to that body; being spirit it cannot be imprisoned in the

material. It is in the body and yet is not of the body; it is there as a kind of aura, surrounding and protecting the body.

One morning when Mungalo is going out to hunt, he first makes an offering to this guardian and says a prayer: "*Tsul musediangu*, be on guard about me to-day. Let the sharp stick sleep. Let all harmful things be harmless. Lead me to meat, O hunter!" And when he has killed, he cuts off choice morsels of heart and liver as an offering and says his thanks.

The spirits, then, are roundabout and accessible. They are approachable. There are methods of divination by which their will can be ascertained. They can speak to the living through the lips of their mediums. They can inspire prophets with messages. They are the custodians of the laws, the customs, the institutions. Any change in these must receive their sanction.

I feel that in this matter—as in so many other matters—the Africans have been sadly misunderstood.

Many are no doubt familiar with Sir James Frazer's words: "There can be little doubt that the fear of the dead has been a prime source of primitive religion."

Thus re-echoes the ancient precept that fear makes gods.

Primitive religion—if we take the word "primitive" in an absolute sense—neither Sir James, with all his erudition, nor you, nor I, know anything. I apply this dictum to the Africans we know—Sir James says again that "in Africa, so far as it has been visited by Europe, the living exist in perpetual bondage to the spirits of the dead"—then, if he means that the Africans are slaves of unmitigated dread, I cannot agree. But what I found among the Ba-ila. And I am happy to find that Cullen Young, an acute and sympathetic observer, arrives at the same conclusion from his experience in Nyasaland. He writes: "A point which

has always puzzled me (is) the allegation that . . . the animist man and woman live in perpetual fear. . . . Is it true? . . . It is not a picture easy to reconcile with the song, the laughter and the dance; the quick reaction to cheerfulness that we find almost everywhere. Duty, apparently, need not be overwhelmingly irksome, nor need loyalty to the ancestors spell terror. Perhaps there is a parallel here with the attitude of the old Romans to their household gods . . . 'pious awe' rather than cringing fear. A possibility of dignity in combination with dependence."<sup>1</sup>

There is undoubtedly some fear, a salutary fear; but the attitude is more correctly described by the Ila word *mampuba*. *Mampuba* is a complex emotion made up of fear, reverence and affection: the specific religious emotion.

The so-called dead and the so-called living are mutually inter-dependent. They need each other. There are reciprocal obligations. And everybody knows that if we fail in our duties toward the "dead" they have the power and the disposition to call us back to loyal obedience by sending sickness and misfortune upon us. Knowing this, we are careful to do our duty. But that is something other than being in perpetual bondage. It is no mere dread.

I believe myself that, among the many who have attempted to define religion, Schleiermacher comes nearest the truth: "The essence of the religious emotion," he said, "consists in the feeling of an absolute dependence." "Religion," says Professor Radcliffe Brown, "develops in mankind a sense of awe." And he proceeds to illustrate this fact by ancestor-worship: an ancestor-worshippe dependent on his ancestors. "From them he received his life and the cattle that are his by in-

<sup>1</sup>T. Cullen Young, *African Ways and Wisdom* (1937).

To them he looks to send him children and to multiply his cattle and in other ways to care for his well-being. This is one side of the matter; on his ancestors he *can* depend. The other side is the belief that the ancestors watch over his conduct, and that if he fails in his duties they will not only cease to send him blessings, but will visit him with sickness or some other misfortune. He cannot stand alone and depend only on his own efforts; on his ancestors he *must* depend. . . . What I am calling the sense of dependence always has these two sides. We can face life and its chances with confidence when we know that there are powers, forces and events on which we can rely, but we must submit to the control of our conduct by rules which are imposed. The entirely asocial individual—and *the entirely irreligious*—would be one who thought that he could be completely independent, relying only on himself, asking for no help and recognizing no duties."<sup>1</sup>

I have by no means exhausted this part of my subject. I should describe the offerings and prayers made within a family and the communal recognition of the great ancestors.

all disembodied spirits come back to be reborn. I open a very sad chapter in African life if I speak of the spirits who are evil. There are certain who go disgruntled out of this life, threatening the survivors; others who are not properly these *are* the objects of dread.

There are some who do not return in the flesh—powerful chiefs who remain in the unseen world to serve the community and to act as intermediaries between the community and the Supreme Being. At Kasenga, there was Shimunenga. He had his local

<sup>1</sup> See Brown, *Religion and Society*. Henry Myers' words in italics are not in the printed lecture but

habitation, a dense grove which was sacred: no person would pluck a leaf or gather a fallen bough for firewood. The grove was a sanctuary. Any person accused of a crime and liable to be killed out of hand by those whom he had wronged was safe if he could reach the shelter of the grove—safe until he could be tried in the court of the Chief. Shimunenga, this communal divinity, had a priest who summoned people to periodical ceremonies; and he alone of the tribe could penetrate the recesses of the grove and hold communion there with Shimunenga. And this he did once a year. Shimunenga was a divinity of real power. To watch the whole community assemble about his grove, all dressed in their best, all happy and singing, and bringing their treasured herds of cattle to exhibit to Shimunenga—this certainly never gave one the impression that the people were moved by dread; but rather by a sense of dependence, by gratitude and a lively expectation of favours to come from his goodwill.

The Baganda acknowledged a company of these lesser gods—what we might call departmental gods. There was Kibuka, the war-god; Walumbe, the god of death, and so on, a considerable pantheon, each one with his sanctuary and mediums. So too in Yorubaland and elsewhere.

There is much that is human and congenial in the belief and practice. Belief in the survival of the dead provides the strongest social bond the African has. The whole tribal system rests upon it—is held together by it. Their attachment to their land—one of the liveliest of their emotions—reposes upon the belief that it is still the abode of their ancestors, who were buried in the soil and whose spirits hover over it even yet. "Where we bury our dead is our home," is commonly believed that fertility of soil and the success of crops come from the goodwill of the ancestors. The firm belief

tribal customs upon their allegiance lies chiefly in the fact that these were handed down to them by revered forbears who will be offended by any unsanctioned breach of customary usage.

I have no doubt that the belief plays a real part in the intimate lives of individual tribesmen and even in the lives of the emancipated. In his remarkable psychological study of a Black Hamlet Dr. Wulf Sachs has portrayed a Rhodesian native living in the exotic conditions of Johannesburg and torn between two worlds. The conflicts which rage in his soul are most graphically and convincingly delineated. Nominally the man was a Christian. He had a warm feeling for the Church, linked with pleasant memories of his schooldays. He loved Christ, loved the ritual, loved singing hymns. But the dominant passion was centred upon his ancestors, particularly his father and grandfather. When he felt that the oneness between them was temporarily broken, he was reduced to utter misery, a sense of guilt oppressed him. Joy returned only when he felt that the bond was restored.<sup>1</sup> Good African Christians of the second and third generations will tell you that in times of trouble they find strength and courage in knowing that their relatives in the unseen world are at hand to help.

There are those who, like my friend Driberg, would say that so-called "Ancestor worship" is religion; it is a projection of the African's social behaviour". One does not pray to his dead grandfather; he summons him, beseeches him, expostulates with him, pleads with him, just as he would do to a living elder. Offerings of food and drink are not sacrifices; they are gifts which as one may bring at any time to one's father; they are in the nature of a communal

<sup>1</sup> Sachs, *Black Hamlet, the mind of an African Negro revealed analysis* (1937).

I agree with much in Mr. Driberg's contention. To discuss it further would lead me too far. Whatever view we take, we cannot deny, I think, that "ancestor-worship" comprises values that should be conserved; and it becomes a question of how the Church can retain those values—that sense of continuity with the past, that reverence for established things, that intense awareness of the immediacy of the spiritual world, that sense of dependence upon unseen powers.

## 3

Now what I have been dealing with hitherto is rightly called Spiritism. The *mizimu*—to use a generic term practically universal in the Bantu area—are personal beings. But Spiritism does not exhaust the subject.

As I continued my studies of the Ba-ila I became convinced that there was another strain in the religion. I collected many facts relating to tabu, the curse, omens, talismans, amulets, medicines, divination, witchcraft; and when I tried to formulate some theory, or working hypothesis, wherewith to interpret all these observations, I saw that Animism did not cover them all. I mean Animism as Tylor defined it—"the theory of souls"; i.e., as Marett says, the theory of a "soul-principle, the vehicle of conscious life and personality which is either separable from the body or independent of body altogether".

I was aware that many of the things I observed usually classified under the head of Magic; I was familiar with Sir James Frazer's views of Magic; all that he had to say about sympathetic and contagious magic, and so forth, did not, to adequately explain the facts before me. The deeper I went into things the more I grew convinced that in the curse, in talismans, and all the



Africans believe that something is at work—some mystic force is released and works.

One of my old friends, Mungaila, slipped a bracelet on to my wrist and told me, with every appearance of earnest conviction, that so long as I wore it everybody would love me. He told me that it contained a powerful drug and that for this secret he had paid a big price. Now this bracelet, and hundreds of similar objects, do not contain a "soul"; it has no relation to any spirit, disembodied or other. All that Africans say and do is only explicable on the hypothesis that they regard a talisman as the vehicle of a potency inherent in things. So too in regard to a curse. The strongest curse known to the Ba-ila is *chikuto*. When a mother has failed to win her son to good ways, she may put a curse upon the incorrigible lad by stripping off her clothes before him. No word may be said: the act is enough. She does not invoke the wrath of spirits or of God. She is releasing a mystic something which will inescapably bring misfortune, disease and sudden death upon her son.

So in regard to tabu. Africans say there are certain things which must not be said, may not be done, may not even be thought or desired. *Chilatonda*, they say, it is tabu. There is a penalty attached to the prohibition. The punishment is not awarded by God or by the ancestral spirits. The essence of a tabu, as distinct from that the penalty is automatic. It is like touching a live wire: it is not the authorities who will fine you for touching their warning of the danger; the live wire, by itself, reacts immediately against you. It covers not only material things such as food; it covers the thoughts and desires of the heart. You come upon ideas in this region that you might find only in the highest religions. Mr. Casalis, a pioneer missionary in Basutoland, relates that he was teaching the Chief the Ten Command-

ments, the Chief repeated only nine. "You have forgotten one," said Mr. Casalis, "Thou shalt not covet." "But no," the Chief said, "I said that when I said 'Thou shalt not steal'. Coveting and stealing are one and the same."

The inner desire is tabu; and will inevitably produce its evil effect.

I had, I remember, reached this point in my research when Dr. Marett's book *The Threshold of Religion* came into my hands. It was an illumination. He held out for the widest possible definition of religion. Since he wrote, the notion of pre-animistic religion has found a place in our thinking. Much of what used to be labelled Magic is now seen rather to be religious because it relates to the specific emotion of awe which men experience in the presence of the supernatural. But personally I do not like the term pre-animism; it seems to beg the question as to the relative priority in time of the conceptions of mere power and of soul or spirit as in some sense personal. Man may have begun by interpreting the supernatural in the terms of power, energy, force, and then have gone on to the concept of personal spirit. But we cannot prove it: it is a matter beyond the possibility of proof. I have preferred, therefore, another term used by Dr. Marett, namely Dynamism, because it seems to express exactly the underlying belief of the Africans in an all-pervading *dunamis*, *potentia*, potency.

When they look out upon the world with all its contingencies and incalculabilities; when in their agriculture and other activities they are constantly face to face with the inexplicable, they become aware of power or powers which excite wonder and awe. Some events may be traceable to the agency of personal spirits; others are not so traceable. Whether the one or the other, to control them or to conciliate them becomes a matter of very great moment.

There is no reason that the African knows why the two kinds of supernatural (so we would say; the African does not know the word or the idea) should not both exist—the world is big enough and strange enough to harbour both. Of personal spirits they know something: they themselves are personal; they know how to propitiate persons. They believe it possible also for those who have the eye and the wisdom to tap and put to work the other, the impersonal, power. Cannot the doctor discover the medicinal virtue of leaves and roots? If he can do that, can he not also put the powers to other uses—give us charms to ward off lightning, to make us beloved, to do a thousand things for our benefit?

It is a dangerous business—more dangerous even than dealing with radium. Only those who have been initiated into the secrets can manipulate the power with safety. In itself—again like radium—it is not good, it is not bad. Men of good disposition may avail themselves of it for beneficent purposes, as do the physicians and sometimes the diviners. Men and women of evil disposition may also avail themselves of it to bring misfortune and death upon other people.

This is Dynamism. What name have Africans for the dynamis? Among the Ba-ila the word is *bwanga*, an abstract term the root of which is also found in the name for the doctor, *munganga*. In one form or another it is used by other tribes, extending from Angola, through Northern Rhodesia, well into central Belgian Congo. In the form of *wanga* it persists among negroes in some parts of the United States and in Haiti. Baumann, who investigated it among the Chokwe, translates *wanga* "zauberkraft", magical power. Other tribes speak of *nkici*, *nkidi*, *lunyensu*. These words, and the ideas they convey, seem to belong to the same circle of concepts as the *mana* of South Sea islanders, and the *orenda* of Amerindians.

Opinions differ as to whether Dynamism should be regarded as religion. You can call the experience denoted by words such as *mana* merely the raw material or protoplasm of religion—as Marett does. But I am inclined to go further. The attitude adopted is fundamentally a religious attitude in face of the supernatural: that direct sense or feeling of the supernatural, which men call “the holy”, is here: *bwanga* is the awesome holy. In the region of the will, Dynamism is very potent. The restraints upon the African’s conduct, and his motives for action, are very largely rooted in dynamism. The trust reposed in vehicles of the dynamis is stronger than many of us put in Providence. And if it be true that what men seek in religion is a sense of enhanced power and a release from frustration, then without question dynamism does very largely meet their needs.

It may all sound very strange in our ears; but have we nothing like it among our very enlightened selves? Does ever an aeroplane leave the flying ground without its mascot? Is not Luck about the only god that many people believe in effectually?

There are Africans who discern all the defects of this rudimentary faith. Captain Rattray tells of a pagan priest devoted to the gods who said to him: “*Suman* spoil the gods”: to him a faith in charms (*suman*) was inimical to the higher faith in God. Dr. M. J. Field tells us that typical Ga high priests have no fetishes: they are the servants of the gods. Dr. Danquah, an educated African, has assailed dynamism as the enemy of his people’s progress. It is the destroyer of will-power. “It is an insult to one’s own dignity to make use of charms,” he says. It is one of the things that Africans must leave behind in their onward march.

But we have to recognize its tremendous power in African life. The detribalized native clings to it when all else ancestral ceases to influence him.

Monica Hunter has recorded some very interesting evidence on this point as the result of her investigations in an urban population in South Africa. "Under town conditions," she says, "the influence of the ancestor cult, which is a binding force in the community, is declining. The belief in magic, on the other hand is maintaining its hold." The old beliefs are adapted to the new conditions. The great majority of adherents and Church members, we are told, believe in witchcraft and magic. A horseshoe—unknown in the old days—is now a common protective charm hung over the door to keep away ghosts. The singing of a hymn has the same effect; only it appears that more modern ghosts are not afraid of hymns; they say: "We lived in the time of electricity, we are not afraid of these things."<sup>1</sup>

Earning a living in town is a precarious business. Prosperity is dependent upon forces over which the worker has no control; and in accordance with the old cultural pattern dynamism (magic) enters where scientific control ends. New magic is developed to meet new needs. When unemployment is bad, medicine is bought from herbalists to ensure the possessor's finding work. A girl will get a medicine to prevent her mistress from dismissing her. If a servant gains favour with master or mistress it is commonly believed that they have done so through using *ubulawu*—a class of medicine used in Pondoland for gaining favour of a chief, or as a love-charm by girls and men. In other parts of Africa some college students purchase charms to ensure their success in examinations.

This continued belief is, as Dr. Hunter points out, a hindrance to economic efficiency and advance in hygiene. Deeply rooted as it is we cannot hope to see it eradicated soon. We must remember that it is still rampant among ourselves: it is the *religione vecchia*, as the Italians say,

<sup>1</sup>Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest* (1936), pp. 455 seqq.

which lies in all of us just under the skin and liable to break out in any crisis. We must reckon with its strength; and nothing will rid the mind of it but the adoption of a new and living faith which will transfer to God that implicit trust which is now reposed in the forces of dynamism. As Dr. Hunter says, "Christianity, in spite of the failures of its adherents, is one of the few integrating forces in the tumult created by the economic revolution. . . . In the practice of Christianity there lies a remedy for the cancers of Western civilization as it exists among Europeans, and as it is transferred to Bantu." And also—I would add—for the cancers of African civilization too.



I pass now to a debatable field. Africans are Spiritists: that is universally accepted. Africans are what I call Dynamists: what others would say, believers in Magic: that also is accepted by all. Are they, in any sense of the term, Theists also? Have they any belief in God—or, as I prefer to say, in a Supreme Being, to whom the name God can be applied without qualification?

A missionary who speaks or writes on this subject expects to have his testimony questioned. We are supposed to be incapable of weighing and criticizing the evidence, and to read much more than is warrantable into what Africans tell us, because we want to prove a thesis. We have been accused of manufacturing names for God; and some people have said that what we report as African belief is nothing more than a reflection of our own teaching.

I do not admit the criticism as applicable to myself. I have no theory to maintain. I only want to get at the facts.

A considerable amount of evidence has been gathered. I agree that it needs sifting by rigid criticism. It is quite easy to compile a list of names and to translate these by the word "God". It is quite another matter—and a much more difficult matter—to interpret the meaning of these names in the African mind.

The greatest volume of evidence has been collected—and not from Africa only—by Father Schmidt, a very learned Roman Catholic, in six or more large tomes. For English readers, there is a translation of his book *The Origin and Growth of Religion* in which his views are expounded. His view is, in brief, that there is a primal revelation of God to mankind, that this can still be traced among all the later religious and magical degeneration. He groups human beings and their cultures in a series of culture horizons, Kulturkreise. The oldest races, he thinks, are to be found in the culture-group which includes the Pygmies of the Congo Forest, and he claims that here we find monotheism in its purest form—the belief in a Being who is one, eternal, omniscient, altogether good, unalterably righteous and omnipotent, the Creator of all things.

I am impressed by Father Schmidt's learning and industry; but I am far from being convinced. For one thing: even were it proved beyond question that the Pygmies represent the oldest ethnic group on earth, and are not a degenerate form of Negro, you cannot argue from them to primitive man. The Pygmies are not primitive in an absolute sense. Man has a long history on this planet, going back perhaps a million years; and what the religious faith of earliest man was nobody knows, nor can possibly know. A theory of original revelation is quite undemonstrable.

I would add that it is hazardous to base any argument upon the alleged monotheism of the Pygmies. Father Schebesta has studied them; but as yet no competent

European observer has lived among them and learnt their language thoroughly. Reports of visitors who can speak only through interpreters must always be received with caution. I believe I am the first to attempt the compilation of a grammar and vocabulary of the Pygmy language and my material is inadequate. I do not press the point, but it is noticeable that the name for God in my material is demonstrably borrowed from Bantu neighbours.

I think that nobody who has studied the evidence would now advocate the theory that, as Grant Allen expressed it, "corpse-worship is the protoplasm of religion"—a euhemerism which teaches that the gods were no more than deified heroes. Much more is to be said in favour of the Marettian scheme, viz. that Africans, and others, have risen to a recognition of a Supreme Being by personalizing the all-pervading potency of which I have spoken.

Now it is precisely here that the greatest difficulty arises in interpreting the religious conceptions of the Africans. Here are these scores of names given by them to Something or Somebody that almost universally is recognized as a supreme power working in the world. That they are aware of the existence and working of such a Power nobody will question who knows them. But is that Power *He* or is it *It*? A Person or a Power? Herbert Spencer could say: "Amidst all the mystery of our inscrutable existence there remains the one absolute certainty that we are in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed." Does that represent the African's creed? Some would answer, Yes; others, No.

Some consider that the Supreme Being is for the Africans Sky Mana, a cosmical energy, and no more. Mr. J. H. Driberg, for example, affirms that the "High God" idea does not exist in Africa; that the religious



beliefs and philosophy of the Africans are fixed primarily on the concept of a universal Power or Energy, which informs and is the cause of all life; an abstract Power or natural potency, formless as the ether, all-pervasive and definitely never regarded anthropomorphically. That the mana-concept enters into African belief and practice I have already maintained. I have no doubt about it. But I cannot agree with those who see no more than Sky Mana in the African's conception of the Supreme Being.

Is He a Creator? I do not like using the word for it seems to imply creating out of nothing; and the words used by Africans no more mean that than does the Hebrew *bara* in the Bible. They employ words that are applied also to human activities: make, mould, construct. That they universally think of a Producer or Originator in this sense is quite certain. The evidence has recently been reviewed by Baumann in an extensive study of African mythology.<sup>1</sup> Primitive philosophy expresses itself in myth. By analysing some 2,500 myths and folk-tales Baumann shows that in the centre of the mythology stand a creative principle and the first man formed and called forth by this creative power. "The fashion in which this man came on earth, how he lived and what he experienced, is the subject of nearly all African mythology." The creation of Heaven and Earth figures much less.

This evidence is not conclusive. The Producer may still be Herbert Spencer's infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed.

Nor can you reach certainty by asking the direct question: is there a Person or a Power? I have never yet succeeded in finding in any African language an equivalent for "person". In this respect these languages

<sup>1</sup>H. Baumann, *Schöpfung und Urzeit des Menschen im Myrhus der Afrikanischen Völker* (1936).

seem to be as barren as English: we had to borrow the word. But that they have some sort of a notion of personality is, I think, clear: in Bantu languages one category in their classification is definitely personal. I cannot agree, as I have already argued, that Africans are so merged in their group as to have no recognition of their own and their fellows' individuality. I have no doubt that such a divinity as Shimunenga is personal in being sharply distinguished from everyone and everything else.

And—if I may badly state my conclusion after much investigation—I am equally convinced that many Africans are just as sure that Leza is a person and not a mere power. Remember what I said about the unanimity of Africans. They do not all agree on this one point. Plato was not sure; can you expect that all Africans will be sure whether the Supreme is He or It?

When I went among the Ba-ila over 40 years ago I took pains to record what the old pagan men had to say about Leza. Everybody seemed to be familiar with the name. They gave Leza many titles which help to explicate their ideas. They call him *Chaba*, "the great giver", *Shintemwe*, "the compassionate one", *Muninde*, "the guardian"; and these are as much personal names as Smith is.

Doubt arises when you find Leza so closely associated with rain—so closely that when it rains they say "Leza is falling". And in a land subject to drought where so much depends upon rain, one can understand their personifying rain as Giver and Guardian. Leza seems to be closely associated, if not identified, with not only rain but also with wind, lightning, thunder and the rainbow. He appeals to them as the Power in celestial phenomena. He is also *Chilenga*, "The Originator"; *Lubumba*, "the Moulder"; *Sbakapanga* "the Constructor". He is *Ushatwakwe*, "Lord of life and death".

As to his benevolence, apart from the giving of rain and fertility, Ba-ila are not so sure; but they tell tales which exonerate him from the blame of death. Ancestors are intermediaries between him and men; but prayer is also on occasion offered to him direct. In the tales Leza is distinctly anthropomorphic. He speaks and acts as a man.

I have recorded a tale told of an old woman who set out to ask Leza questions: why he inflicted suffering upon mankind. It is a common notion among Africans that the Supreme Being removed himself from among men to the remote skies because of man's wrong-doing.

So much, in rough outline, for the Ba-ila. I have presented some of the beliefs of other tribes in my book, *The Secret of the African* and in my introduction to theology for African students, *African beliefs and Christian Faith*.

I have been criticized for putting forward the belief in God as the best approach by missionaries, the basis for teaching our faith. The vague theism is, I am told, far less effective in African life than the ancestor cult. I agree that it is so; but I am quite unrepentant. I still believe that in presenting Christianity to the African one should begin where the African has left off; and that it is for us to develop all the rich promise that lies in their awareness, however vague it may be, of a Supreme Being.

Religion is not the same thing as knowledge—not even knowledge of the Bible. It is the growing sense of the reality of God, of man's dependence upon God, and of the unseen divine action. We have to make God real to the Africans and lead them to concentrate upon Him all the devotion they now give to ancestral spirits and charms.

## Chapter Six

### AFRICAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

#### 1

VERY few people, I imagine, are aware of the tremendous effort that is being made to educate the African on modern lines. I am not saying that the effort is adequate to the needs; far from it. But in British Africa alone there are over two million young Africans in the schools. Belgian Congo adds half a million to the figure.<sup>1</sup>

Some years ago it was estimated that 95 per cent. of the schools were run by missionary societies. I have some doubt as to the accuracy of that proportion; but certainly the large majority of the schools are definitely Christian schools.

In recent years in the countries where Indirect Rule is established, the tendency is for the Native Administrations to open and manage educational institutions. But the declared policy of the British imperial government is to encourage, inspect and largely finance the schools that are in the hands of the Missions. They co-operate in this way because they recognize that religion is a necessary part of education.

A recent discussion in *The Times* on "Religion and the Nation" has emphasized the place of religion in education. Let me quote from a letter by Mr. M. L. Jacks, Director of the Department of Education in the University of Oxford.

<sup>1</sup>Mr. H. S. Scott estimates that of every 1,000 children (6-14 years) in British tropical Africa 225 attend school. Of these 86.4 per cent are in Mission schools, aided or unaided. *Africa*, vol. XV (1945), No. 4. p. 277.

"It is not enough that there should be education—it must be education of an intelligible and coherent type, comprehensive in its aims, and unified in its processes. This involves the spiritualization of the whole educational process. A purely secular education provides the teacher with no final objective and makes no sense for the learner. It is only a Christian philosophy of education, expressed in and through all subjects and activities, that can supply these two needs. This is the real problem of religious education—a much bigger problem than adding religious instruction to the time-table as one subject among others, or finding more time for it, or determining its content, or solving denominational difficulties. All those are important, but they fade into insignificance beside the all-important matter of making religion the co-ordinating subject of the curriculum (indeed the only subject to be taught), the unifying element in school experience, the ultimate sanction for what we teach, and the source of all sense."

Mr. Jacks was writing with the home situation in view; but his words justify all that the missionary societies have done and are still doing in Africa.

When one reflects upon the place that religion holds in the life of pagan Africa one sees how contrary any system of secular education would be to the African's nature. And if, as is true, we are breaking down the old organization with its religious sanctions, we should do infinite mischief if we failed to supply new sanctions of conduct.

I think that the great majority of educational officers in Africa would agree on this point. But on other matters there seems not to be the same unanimity.

Is it the purpose of our schools to help the Africans to adapt themselves to a new and rapidly changing world? Or is it to provide them with a better equipment for dealing with their own immediate environment?

The two aims are not mutually exclusive. It is a matter of emphasis; and chiefly emphasis upon one or the other elements of instruction—the African element, or the European element.

Forty-seven years ago, when I began my career by teaching in a South African training school, the emphasis was wholly upon the European side; the native language was totally disregarded and the syllabus was precisely the same as in schools for white people. The aim was to develop the Africans on European lines by means of the schools. Things have moved a long way since then, but not far enough, in my opinion, in the direction of Africanizing education.

Lord Hailey, in his monumental *African Survey*, discusses the subject in the light of all the social revolution that is taking place. He deals gently with the old system, acknowledging that it must have given to many Africans a quicker intelligence and greater breadth of outlook and helped to produce habits of discipline and application. "But it could not be said to be the type of education most adapted to help the African make the best of his own environment." It did not meet the needs of the population at large. It did not meet the needs of men and women who had to remain members of an African society.

Lord Hailey recognizes that "in Africa education is, and is intended to be, an instrument of change". But looking to the precipitate transformations that are being induced under the pressure of western civilization, he also says: "So far as deliberate policy can affect the issue, it is clear that in the interests of the African himself [education] should seek to moderate the pace of change, and allow full scope for the innate characteristics of the people to assert themselves in the conflict of forces that must ensue."

It is the declared policy of the Imperial government

that education in Africa "should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life."

That declaration marks the advance we have made from the old principle of treating the African as if he were a black European. It most emphatically does not mean that we wish to stop any African from climbing as far as he can up the educational ladder. It does mean that we pay respect to the African tradition.

## 2

In view of all this, it is strange that so little regard is given to indigenous African education. In the past, I think it can be said, the people responsible for the schools worked on the assumption that Africans have no culture that is worth perpetuating, and no method of transmitting it that need to be taken into account.

Mr. H. S. Scott in the *Year Book of Education* 1938, shows considerable understanding and sympathy, as does the Rev. J. W. C. Dougall in an article, based on Mr. Scott's, in *Africa*.<sup>1</sup> But for the most part, authoritative writings on education ignore it altogether or make scant reference to it. Even the latest—Lord Hailey's *Survey*—is content to dismiss it in half a dozen lines; and modern methods, he says, cannot follow the traditional form of tribal instruction. That may be so; and yet there may be much in the traditional form that is worth preservation. There may be things in it that would supplement the work of our schools. We should not be too proud to learn from the Africans if they have anything to teach us about education. I believe they have something to teach. People are apt to forget—if they ever knew—that the Boy Scout movement, the

<sup>1</sup>*Africa*, vol. XII (1938), pp. 322 *seqq.*

most fruitful of modern educational developments, was very largely inspired by what Baden-Powell learnt in Africa of indigenous education. That Movement both expressed and enhanced a conviction that schooling and education are not one and the same thing. We must never forget the difference. Many of the elements of education—and perhaps the most valuable—are imparted outside the school.

That distinguished educationist, Sir Michael Sadler, has emphasized this fact. "The opportunities for recreation, bathing, hiking, motoring, cycling and foreign travel are all essentially ingredients in the new education. . . . Not only the appreciation of pictures and architecture, but painting, drawing, and all kinds of odd jobs about the house, good cookery, gardening, and decorating rooms, all these things are really part of life and education." Education is not to be regarded as a subject by itself; it is one aspect of life.

I find the same conviction in the United States. "The new emphasis is here," writes Dr. A. J. W. Myers, "and is changing educational procedure. . . . The new emphasis is to recapture or to conserve, or to develop in the school, the educational values in the best pioneer homes. The ordinary school in those days was something of a mill for grinding information into the pupils. It was formal and abstract. But the home and farm were instinct with life. Boys and girls, as well as men and women, were at grips with reality. Each had to fend for himself in a world where resourcefulness and ingenuity and work counted. The contrast between the abstract, formal study in school and the vital life on the farm was striking. In the light of a century or two there is no question which was the more educative, the more formative. The present tendency is to make the school conform more to that active, vital, farm and home situation."



We can understand what Bernard Shaw meant when he declared that his schooling had interrupted his education.

Now in this emphasis on the informal elements of education, on activities outside the school, on learning by doing, on setting lessons in life situations, we are simply going back—or I should say, going forward—to African educational methods. We have surely something to learn from them: and it will be a happy day for Africa when the perfect synthesis has been made of European and African methods. Why should not our schools in Africa be an object lesson to the rest of the world?

We can readily understand why those people who ignored the informal aspects of education should have passed over the African system. The Africans had no schools as we know schools: they had no books; they possessed not so much as an alphabet. I am speaking now of pagan Africa, not of the Islamized part and the Koranic schools.

So long as education is defined in terms of school the observer has nothing to study. But if you define education as the whole process by which one generation transmits its culture to the succeeding generation, then most decidedly it is impossible to deny that Africans educate their young.

Their culture consists of a whole complex of institutions, handicrafts, industries, manners, customs, laws, knowledge, beliefs, values, language. Each generation as it comes along does not begin *de novo*; it takes over all these things as its social heritage; and it passes them on in its turn, more or less modified.

In this matter, Africans do not differ essentially from ourselves. We have our social heritage, which is of no less importance than the biological inheritance. The African's heritage differs from ours in its elements, but

radically it is of the same kind. His mechanism of transmission is not of an entirely different sort from ours. The point of divergence lies in the fact that we have a system of writing and that the school, which seizes our youth continuously from early age to adulthood, has as its unique and essential (though not its most important) function to teach its pupils to read and to know good books. We add schooling, that is to say, to education.

## 5

I wish to offer some observations on the content and method of African education.

First, the content.

Obviously I cannot cover the ground in a chapter. For, since education is the transmission of culture, to describe the content would be to describe the whole life of the Africans.

The child must know something of the world of things: of the environment in which his people live—the plains, the rivers, the mountains, the pasturage, the arable lands, the hunting and fishing grounds; the forest fruits, the grasses, the edible and other plants; the wild and domestic animals; the heavens; the weather. All these things set the conditions in which the Africans live. A certain degree of knowledge has accumulated about them; certain emotional attitudes have been adopted in regard to them; certain sentiments have grown around them. The African's existence depends upon adjustment to them. The younger generation must be given that knowledge; brought to adopt those attitudes, share those sentiments; taught to make that adjustment. They must learn to make and use the tools which the experience of the past has evolved: spear and axe and hoe; baskets and pots.

The child is born into a human environment: into his

family, clan, tribe, and the wider circle of friends and strangers. He cannot live alone; every act, thought and emotion is conditioned by other human beings. He must learn to live in his group, to maintain it, defend it, propagate it. To this end he must be disciplined into control of his instinctive impulses. The manners, customs, laws, inhibitions which the experience of the past has proved necessary to the integration of the social structure must be made bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. Decency of speech and behaviour, respect for his superiors in age and rank, a diligent sharing of the common tasks, must be inculcated.

In particular, social life involves regulation of the commerce of the sexes. The canons of correct behaviour as understood by the tribe must be learnt; a complicated system of avoidances, tabus, permissions, injunctions, must be acquired and passed on.

Moreover, as I pointed out in a previous chapter, the African community consists of visible and invisible members; and the young must learn of these invisible members and his obligations to them. He must learn also of the mysterious powers around him and how to adjust himself to them, whether to use or to avoid.

Furthermore, ideals of physical form and quality, of intelligence, of moral character, are involved in all this process of standardization. Africans have very definite ideas as to what constitutes good citizenship; and they seek to mould their offspring in accordance therewith.

They also have their own standards of beauty in natural forms, in art, and in language. They find joy in the making of things that in some measure satisfy their sense of what should be. Music and the dance take a large place in their culture.

All these components of their culture are handed on from generation to generation. That is to say: Africans educate their children.

## 4

How do they do it? What are their methods?

In brief we may say there are three methods.

First, the formal method, as when the boy is apprenticed to a trade, or when the traditional rules of conduct are impressed upon boys and girls during the initiation rites. Second, the informal method, as when young people learn by imitation. Third, the unconscious method, as when children in their play unknowingly obey impulses which have a social end and which are stimulated by the actions of their seniors.

There is oral instruction; but it is not the most important means of education. The young African learns chiefly through participation in the activities of the community.

We may think of African society as a number of concentric circles and of other circles which impinge upon these. The inmost is the biological family, then there are the extended family, the clan, the tribe, and various other groupings.

Boys and girls are introduced successively into these circles; and as they enter one after another they acquire, partly by precept but chiefly by the example and pressure of their fellows, the standards of conduct, the emotional attitudes, and the knowledge appropriate to the stage which they have reached. Each circle brings an enhanced status with corresponding duties and responsibilities. In this progressive manner they arrive ultimately at full membership of the tribe, emerging as socialized persons with knowledge of what is required of them and fitted to the emotional and active life which awaits them. Their character is formed through the relationships which together compose the well-knit African community.

It would take me much too far to describe in detail all the processes which I have thus briefly summarized.

I may, however, at this point enlarge upon the initiation rites. Some writers who recognize the existence of education among the Africans appear to think that the education is confined to these rites; but as I may indicate presently that is not so. They have been well described as *rites de passage*; but as such they form but one of a series of such rites. It is as if the young African passed through a number of doors each leading to a wider experience. Each stage of his progress is attended by certain dangers; each door represents a crisis; and he must be prepared for going on further. The initiation rites are perhaps the most serious for they mark the supreme crisis—the passage from juvenility into adulthood, from a period of irresponsibility into responsible membership of the tribe—but they are not the only rites of initiation.

These rites are an occasion for instructing the initiates into tribal customs and history.

This is not universally true. And it may be that in some tribes the boys and girls are not taught a great deal that they do not know before they go into the seclusion of the initiatory camp. It is the manner rather than the amount of instruction that is of prime importance. It has been rightly said, I think, that in the initiation Africans show themselves to be good practical psychologists. At this period of peculiar plasticity everything is done to heighten the temperature so that the youthful minds may receive an indelible impression.

The boys are taken away into a camp by themselves and isolated from the villagers. No woman may enter that camp. An atmosphere of mystery is thrown about it. Special costumes may be worn. Men representing terrifying monsters strike dread into the boys by their antics. There may be a symbolical putting to death and

a resurrection. The initiates are subject to the severest of disciplines. The rough treatment, the floggings, the exposure to cold, the fatiguing dances, the abnormal sexual practices, the "obscene" songs—all these things induce a state of super-excitation. Nor must we forget the way in which the revered ancestors are brought in to share these rites—the prayers (if Mr. Driberg will permit me to use the term) that are offered for blessing upon the new members of the tribe. Where definite instruction is given—and I believe it is given in most schools of this kind—it is given in this context, not poured out in a flood, but imparted as an accompaniment to all the activities of the camp. The boys never forget what they have been taught. The stamp which the metal receives in this malleable condition remains for ever. The boys emerge as new beings. They are given new names which are a witness and a pledge that old things have passed away—they are now men.

I suppose that in the past all missionaries regarded these initiatory rites with horror. Many missionaries still adopt that attitude. They have become aware of some of the secret practices in the camps and have revolted against them as being definitely contrary to Christian morals. They have carried on an active campaign of suppression; and in some quarters they have succeeded. In many areas the rites have been discredited and abandoned.

Some have acted on more general grounds. To them, the rites are part and parcel of—I quote from a missionary magazine—an "abominable system of Satanic religion". We must refuse, it is said, to participate in any practice not commanded in the all-sufficient Word of God. We must not associate the Name that is above every name with some action or custom whose origin and history, if we knew it, would make us shudder. To do so would be to imperil precious souls.

Some missionaries acknowledge that the rites have certainly had educational significance for the youth of Africa. "Discipline," they say, "respect for elders, physical endurance, *esprit de corps*, are all acknowledged virtues, the value and necessity of which are vigorously impressed upon the boys during the ceremonies and which are doubtless furthered by them. For the age in which they arose and for the people who have used them the rites have also a moral significance. They stand to the animist for principles of morality, belief and worship which should never be despised or ridiculed, which one dare not take from him without putting something in its place."

Yet the knowledgeable, sympathetic, missionary from whom I have quoted these sentences will not countenance any taking over of African custom and teaching. He argues on theological grounds. As the African rites have had a positive value for the African so the Mosaic Law had a positive value for the Israelites—each is to be regarded as a *paidagogos*, bringing to Christ. But as Christ was the end of the law for the Jew, so also is He for the African. In the Gospel is poured out divine power for moral regeneration. To introduce puberty rites into the Church would be to recognize a competitor of the Gospel which it cannot tolerate. The moral regeneration of mankind is the gift of God, not the work of man. I ask myself whether this missionary conducts any schools on European lines. To be consistent he should surely have no such schools to be competitors of the Gospel. Perhaps he would say they are Christian institutions; while the initiation rites—for all their acknowledged moral value—are pagan. But *are* our schools Christian in origin? Did not Christians take the idea from Jews or Greeks or Romans? How then can we refuse to take over from Africans any educational ideas of value?

Happily these missionaries do not speak for all their brethren.

We see the results of breaking down this old institution. In the writings of men and women who know the Africans in the present stage of transition, nothing is more common than a lament over the lack of discipline in the young. There is no commoner complaint among the Africans themselves. The indiscipline is due partly to the decreased parental control as the result of economic conditions; but also in no small degree to the suppression of the initiatory rites. The complaint is that the schooling given by Europeans does not meet the case.

Why not take a leaf out of the African's book? Why not take the old initiatory rite, purge it of objectionable features, enrich it from the storehouse of Christian wisdom and experience, conduct it with as elaborate a ceremonial as belonged to it of old, and then offer it as the initiatory rite for all Christian or catechumen Africans?

That is what Bishop Lucas of the Universities' Mission set out to do some years ago. In the Masasi diocese Christian African elders of the tribe conduct the rites. Instruction on traditional lines is imparted as well as definite Christian instruction. The old atmosphere is retained but purified; simple services in Church take the place of invoking the blessing of ancestors. The whole act closes in a feast of dancing and general rejoicing.

The degree of success attained by the Bishop is attested by two facts; the tribal authorities accepted the Christian rite as legally equivalent to the pagan rite as an initiation into full membership of the tribe; and pagan parents sought to have their sons admitted to the Christian rite, so impressed were they by its superiority.

So far I have spoken of the initiation of boys. There are also analogous rites for girls, often including opera-



tions corresponding to the circumcision of boys. Whatever may be the shortcomings of these rites, they aimed at the discipline of sexual impulses and the inculcation of obedience, patience, humility, along with definite instruction in sexual and other matters which concerned married women.

Some tribes are so anxious to preserve their girls from pre-marital pregnancy that they shut them away in rigorous confinement the moment they reach puberty until marriage. As among the Zaramo of Tanganyika Territory, the girls are confined to dark huts for months—even years. Not a word can be said in favour of this rigid seclusion for such long periods. A large proportion of the girls become mentally deranged. When they emerge from the dark huts they have to be treated like invalids—they are incapable of working for some time. The mental reactions to the repression of every youthful impulse for years are often disastrous. And the main purpose of the seclusion is not always achieved for many of the girls come out pregnant. The custom, we are told, retains little but the injurious characteristics which at once strike the alien observer—damage to both mental and physical health. Why not, then, abolish the business by forceful governmental action?

The Berlin Lutheran Mission has adopted a more excellent way. It has made a carefully planned and determined attempt to develop out of the old system one more compatible with a higher standard of ethics and general culture. It aims to eradicate what was harmful, while retaining traditional practices as far as possible.

The Mission is achieving its object by combining training of girls in a boarding school with a modified traditional seclusion of two months previous to entering the school. Much of the old ceremonial has been incorporated so that the new system shall be as far as possible an evolution from the old and not a complete break with

the past. The girls remain in the school until they are married. The wedding is celebrated with a modified form of traditional festivities and ratified by the passage of bride-wealth in accordance with tribal law. "One can scarcely imagine a greater difference than that between the girls in the huts and the happy healthy crowd of girls in the school."

So says the German lady in charge.

The girls do all kinds of practical work in school; all the activities are planned with their future circumstances in mind; everything being run as far as possible on native lines. Their daily life is organized on a family basis and all valuable traditions as contained in history, games, riddles, proverbs, are consciously fostered. The aim of the whole work is to produce good wives and mothers.

Mrs. G. M. Culwick, a trained anthropologist, who has described this interesting development, says there can be no doubt that the girls go to their bridegrooms far fitter in mind and body than the miserable cowed little creatures who creep out into the sun after years of darkness, and far better qualified to make their contribution to their own, and the succeeding generation.<sup>1</sup>

## 5

There is much more that could be said about the initiation rites; but I have sufficiently illustrated the role they played in the old African society and the role they may continue to play in the new society.

Important as the rites are they must not be regarded as the sole means of educating the young African under the old conditions.

The rites are not universal in Africa and where they are absent the transmission of culture still goes on. And,

<sup>1</sup>*Africa*, October, 1939.

as I have already stated, where they exist they do not stand alone but form one of a series of progressive *rites de passage* which introduce African youth into stages of their life. To understand how the young African is trained it would be necessary to follow him in detail through these stages. They are more strongly emphasized by some tribes than by others, but would appear to be universally recognized.

The most elaborate system is perhaps the system encountered among the Nilo-Hamitic tribes. The Didinga, for example, initiate boys into successive stages at the age of eight, thirteen, eighteen and twenty-eight; and there are degrees beyond that age. There is definite instruction at each stage.<sup>1</sup>

It is rare among the Bantu to find a continuous, or even an intermittent, course of formal instruction that corresponds in any degree to our schools. An exception is offered by the Venda of the Northern Transvaal, who have—or had—an indigenous school through which all young boys passed, entering when they were seven or eight years of age and remaining until they were physically qualified to pass through the tribal initiation rite. During this period the boys were not wholly withdrawn from ordinary life; they repaired to the school after completing their daily duty of herding the cattle. We know little about what they were taught; but it seems that severe discipline was the rule, that tribal etiquette and rules of politeness were enforced and that manual instruction of a practical kind was given.<sup>2</sup>

The institutions I have mentioned are for the purpose of formal instruction and discipline. We are not to imagine that in any African tribe the beginnings of education are deferred to the age of eight. Educationists recognize that the period of active habit-formation from

<sup>1</sup>J. H. Driberg, *At Home with the Savage* (1932), pp. 232 *seqq.*

<sup>2</sup>H. A. Stuyt, *The Buvenda* (1931), pp. 101 *seqq.*

two to six is by far and away the most fateful in a human life. Unfortunately our information in regard to the African child at this age is extremely vague and meagre. Very few—if any—of the tribes have been studied from this angle by competent educational psychologists. An exception is the Tallensi who have been studied by Dr. M. Fortes, one of the research Fellows of the African Institute. I commend his article in *Africa* on "Social and Psychological aspects of Education in Taleland."<sup>1</sup>

From all we know, it is clear that Africans set themselves to educate their children with deliberation and purpose.

The education begins in infancy within the family—the narrow biological group. For the infant the mother is, of course, the most important member of that group. She provides its nourishment, watches over it with solicitude, and by her croonings and lullabies evokes its power of speech. The earliest and most enduring sentiment is formed in regard to her. "You may have many wives," the Ba-ila say to a bridegroom, "remember always you can have only one mother." The infant's sisters help her: the girls, if there are any, learn early to act as nurses.

The father's part is important especially when the boy begins to talk and walk. This is true even among the matriarchal peoples where the father's legal rights in his children are weak. Rattray gives a list of some of the first lessons taught to the Ashanti child. "Even in the nursery," he says, "the Ashanti child is trained to avoid those pitfalls which in later life constitute his chief danger of coming within the arm of the law, i.e., he has been admonished to avoid sexual offences; to be careful to guard his tongue; to respect other people's property;

<sup>1</sup>Supplement to *Africa*, vol. XI, No. 4: reprinted as memorandum, No. XVII.

he is also at an early age instructed in the matter of tabus." The part played by the father is well illustrated in the life of Dr. Aggrey. He told us how his father, the Chief's spokesman, would take him into court, teach him how to observe the countenances and actions of witnesses. He thus laid the foundation of the astonishing insight into human nature that was characteristic of the mature Aggrey.

The quick African child learns not only from his parents but even more by using ears and eyes to observe what goes on around him. Children are not isolated from the activities of their elders. There is no baby-talk in the African home: the parents talk to their children as if they expected the children to understand normal adult speech. They also expect them to behave in the normal manner. There are things which may not be done; words which may not be spoken. The child sees how father and mother, elder brothers and sisters behave towards each other; and through their manifest approval or disapproval comes to know how he is expected to behave. Ridicule—that most powerful of sanctions—is early brought to bear upon him.

In one way or another, the child acquires the proper attitudes towards those who are in a position of authority over him; and this is perhaps the most important thing he learns, for upon these patterns he will mould his behaviour to others when he leaves the family group for a larger circle. The respect he has learnt for his mother's and sister's sex will be extended to all those women whom he comes to address as "my mother" or regard as "our sister". The incest tabu is implanted in him for life. The reverence for his father will in due course be extended to his uncles and to the elders and chiefs of the tribe.

The child very early begins to be familiar with those relationship terms which in the classificatory system

give ethnographers so much trouble by their intricacy.

As early as three or four he can discriminate kinsfolk from others; by the time he is six he knows the correct terms of address and behaviour; by the time he is eleven or twelve he has mastered the whole complicated system. He has learnt how to address the persons he meets, those related to him by blood and marriage, and those not so related. And he has learnt the proper behaviour due to each one. If he does not behave as he should there is trouble for him.

Everybody knows that certain foods are prohibited to certain Africans. The totem-animal of the clan is rigorously tabu; there are other tabus to be observed particularly by young people. Every tabu has attached to it an automatic penalty; and, in addition, the elders inflict punishment for infringement in order to impress the prohibition upon the young person's mind. But, as Dr. Fortes says of the Tale people, Africans submit to a food tabu in virtue of a configuration of positive habits and dispositions built up in childhood, not through fear of the sanctions. "From the time that it is a babe in arms a child is prevented from tasting or even touching any food which it is prohibited from eating. Later it will be called away from where its companions are sitting over a fire roasting tit-bits of food forbidden to it—'Come here, you mustn't eat that; it is forbidden.' I once observed [says Dr. Fortes] a child of about 5 standing aloof while a group of his brothers and sisters were consuming a dish of python meat—a prized delicacy. 'I don't eat python, it is my tabu,' he explained, with an expression of complete aversion."

This sort of thing may appear to be merely silly to us; but it is all part and parcel of the excellent discipline to which the young Africans are subjected.

The family group continues to govern the African's

conduct long after he has ceased to be a child; but when he can walk and talk he is brought gradually into association with other groups which influence him. To use Dr. Fortes' expression, his "social space" becomes enlarged. The educational agencies to which he is subjected become more numerous and more diverse and his experiences more variegated as he participates in an ever-increasing range of social situations. He learns much from his youthful companions who are slightly more experienced than himself.

The young folk, while, as I have said, they are not isolated from adult life flowing around them, yet have a world of their own into which they enter joyfully whenever they can escape from the tasks imposed upon them by their elders: a world in which distinctions of age and rank are recognized, and in which strong character early shows itself in leadership.

The youthful playmates of the Thonga chief are taught to respect him; he is surrounded in his games by a miniature court, from which he chooses his favourites; some of his companions act as councillors and reprimand the boys who fail to treat him with due respect. In their play they reproduce the proceedings of the Chief's court of justice. In this and in other respects the young show themselves interested in the life of their elders and imitate it.

They are not excluded from religious ceremonies. They watch, and even take some little part in, the preparation of sacrifices; they stand on the fringe and listen to the prayers; and then in their play reproduce it all so far as they can.

They have an infinitude of games which they play with zest and in which the serious pursuits of adults figure largely. Tiny toddlers will be seen prodding gleefully with stems of stout grass into the ground where a sweet potato is hidden—it is their first lesson

in the use of the spear. Larger boys fight fierce battles with longer stems of thick grass as spears, practising all the casts and parryings, the feints, charges and retreats, used by the warriors of the tribe. Girls play with dolls and begin early to fashion miniature pots and baskets. Thus by mimesis the energies of youth are canalized in the direction of adult activities.

We see this particularly in the small villages of miniature huts which the children of some tribes build for themselves. The girls may play the game by themselves; choosing a "headman" of the village, pairing off as "husband" and "wife", grinding corn, cooking, all according to the habits and manners of their elders. Or the boys and girls may live together during the day in this toy-village, even to the point of going "man" and "wife" to bed in the huts.

Boys and girls are introduced early into the economic life of the community. This is a valid part of their education. They acquire various skills, not in a classroom, but by actual doing. They learn by participating in practical tasks. As Dr. Fortes says again about the Tallensi, Africans "do not make systematic use of training situations. They teach through real situations which children are taught to participate in because it is expected that they are capable and desirous of mastering the necessary skills".

Children of both sexes at the age of five or six are set to herd goats or small calves in the vicinity of the village. At about ten the boy may be promoted to accompany the cattle herds, and at certain seasons this may involve absence from home for several months. He learns to manage the beasts; to distinguish the grasses, nutritious and noxious; to recognize the symptoms of cattle disease; to doctor wounds. The boy may never again work so hard as he works in this phase of his life. But while working he is acquiring a great amount of



miscellaneous knowledge. He comes to have a minute and extensive acquaintance with the names and habits of animals and insects, with the names and uses of plants and trees. I asked young boys of my school to bring me specimens of grasses; and they quickly brought in twenty-four kinds, each with its name and use neatly ticketed.

The accuracy with which many young Africans learn to count (in tens) is also noteworthy; they begin early, by means of little ditties, to know numbers; where cowries were in use as currency there were names up to a million.

Similarly the girls are brought at a tender age to share in the occupations of their mothers and elder sisters. Almost as soon as she can walk the girl begins to carry a receptacle by balancing it upon her head; and very soon she will come back with her mother from the river or water-hole bearing her little water-pot in this manner. It induces to strong muscles and an upright carriage. She learns by her mother's example all there is to know about the production and preparation of food after the native manner. Young girls of eleven or twelve can already cook all the common dishes.

So both boys and girls are brought into close association with their elders and consciously or unconsciously mould their lives after the elders' pattern.

Where the father is skilled as an ironworker or wood-carver or other tradesman, he may teach his skill to his son. Some tribes have a system of apprenticeship, with a course of two or more years of training and the payment of fees. In other instances the boys watch the skilled workmen—there is always a group of interested youngsters around the forge—and some will begin to do little jobs for them and to be drawn into an informal apprenticeship.

Among the riverine peoples, boys are taught to

handle canoes and to paddle with agility, grace and accuracy. The Congo father will give his son a toy paddle and teach him to backwater, to steer, to move in unison with others. He teaches him, too, to make fish-traps and nets, the best places to put them, and how to bait and cast a hook. Lads of ten and twelve know the names of innumerable fish in the streams, their habits and the best ways of catching them. Boys are also initiated early into the art of hunting: to track various animals according to their habits; the spears to use for various purposes; the ways of skinning and cutting up; and all the magical and religious practices peculiar to the hunter. Among the Ba-ila it was a common practice, when a lion had been mortally wounded near a village, to bring small boys near, put spears into their hands and make them lunge at the beast before life was extinct. Thus they were brought up to face the fiercest beasts without fear.

Dancing is a great feature of African life—dancing and the accompanying song. Nothing is more charming than to watch little boys and girls trying to dance like their elders. Women amuse themselves by trying to teach tiny tots who are barely able to maintain an upright posture for ten minutes. And Dr. Fortes testifies that infants respond with every sign of pleasure to such stimulus and by the age of about three have learnt, in a sketchy and diagrammatic but specifically recognizable way, the rhythms and the main steps of the festival dances. The six-year-old has advanced so far that he or she can sometimes join the real dancing of the adolescents. His sense of rhythm is accurate, he learns the songs quickly, and he has the pattern of the dance clearly in mind. He goes on learning; and from babyhood to maturity dancing ability grows continuously.

## 6

From what I have said you will agree, I think, that Africans do educate their children. It is a genuine education.

Its limitations are obvious enough to us. There is no opening of the mind by means of books and pictures such as our homes and schools provide. But these deficiencies should not blind us to its values. What the African sets out to do—namely, to prepare the new generation to take its place in the community and carry on the tribal tradition—he accomplishes with a considerable measure of success.

He gives the central place to social behaviour in his system of training the young. Social behaviour, as Mr. Dougall says, is only on the fringe of our educational consciousness. We may talk a good deal about the formation of character; but in actual practice the impartation of knowledge is the dominating object of our schools. The African's method was to utilize real situations occurring in the normal life of the community. Boys and girls learnt their lessons through participation in real tasks. Africans thus employed the most effective means of moral training.<sup>1</sup>

It may be said that the education is conservative and not creative. It is conservative in design. But we have already seen in an earlier chapter that African culture is not static; there is movement in it, and change; and such variations, when they meet with general approval, are equally with the more remote tradition handed on in the manner I have described.

What Mr. Bryant said of the Zulus may with equal truth be said of other tribes:

"Through the ages this admirable system of forming

<sup>1</sup>J. W. C. Dougall, *op. cit.*

character and imparting knowledge continued, until at length was evolved a Zulu race noble of heart, dignified of bearing, refined of manners, and learned in natural science—qualities, alas! rapidly dying out before the destructive and demoralizing advance of European civilization.”

That concluding sentence applies to-day to many African peoples. It is within the family, as we have seen, that the education—the most vital discipline and instruction—is given. And it is precisely the family that under modern conditions is being assailed.

How can we conserve the values of the old indigenous education and unite them with the values of the modern schooling? Africa needs them both—needs a real marriage of the two, with a resulting *tertium quid*.

## Chapter Seven

### THE FUNCTION OF AFRICAN FOLK-TALES

**EVERYBODY** who knows anything about Africans knows that they are great story-tellers.

I shall not deal, except perhaps incidentally, with some questions that are of great interest: the origin of the tales, their distribution, the insight which they afford into the mentality of the Africans. I limit myself to one aspect of this fascinating theme: the function of the tales. I shall not ask how they came into being, nor how it happens that certain tales are known so widely in Africa; but simply, what is the use of the tales?

#### 1

I begin with what is most obvious: the *recreative* function of the tales. First and foremost, they are told for entertainment.

They are the counterpart of our modern novel. And I need hardly remind you that the literature of fiction which has attained so large a growth among us sprang from tales told orally.

The *novelle* were told before they were written. Boccaccio describes how a company of ladies and gentlemen, escaped from Florence during a plague, assembled day by day in a shady place on the green grass, and passed their time *novellando*, telling the tales that were afterwards gathered into the Decameron. At least that is how he represents it. And to-day, for every one person who reads fiction to improve his mind or his morals—if anyone ever does so—a thousand read to

amuse themselves. And where, as in Africa, there were no books, the merry tale has held its own. The normal development takes place when Africans write novels—as some of them are doing now.

The African is not the idle person that he is sometimes represented to be. When the cool of the evening succeeds the heat of the day, when work is over and the principal meal is consumed, the time arrives for recreation. They dance long hours, or they gather around the fires for amusement of, shall we say? a literary character. They ask each other riddles, or they tell tales. The evening is the time for this recreation. Among some tribes it is actually tabu to tell these tales except then—they say you will go bald if you tell them during the day. Dr. Junod suggests that the prohibition is due to the fear that the tales being so interesting men would do no work if they got to telling them in working hours. It might very well be so; but I should assign another reason. African children are like European children: they dearly love a story before they go to bed. Men and women heard many of these tales when they were still young—heard them from their mothers and grandmothers in the evening when these hard-worked women had leisure. Adults are but children of a larger growth and they have continued to look upon the final hour before retiring as the time for tales. To tell them at any other time hardly seems natural. What is done is what ought to be done: hence the tabu.

So they gather around the fires. Who that has experienced it can forget the charm of that witching hour—the flickering firelight illuminating the eager faces; while the dark forest forms the background, and the stars hang with tropical brilliance in the black sky. Somebody starts a story. They all know some, and there is almost certain to be one person at least whose repertoire is a full one. The professional tale-teller, such as I have

heard in the markets of Morocco, is not, I believe, to be found among the Bantu or Negro tribes. But some individuals are superlatively clever at narration where many can narrate. The finest raconteur I ever heard in Africa or beyond was my old friend, Mungalo. With him there was no lip-mumbling; every muscle of face and body spoke, a swift gesture often supplying the place of a whole sentence. He was expert in the use of pauses in heightening the effect. The tones of his voice varied in an inimitable manner. When he told a beast-tale each animal spoke in its own voice; the deep rumbling of Momba, the ground Hornbill, for example, contrasting vividly with the piping accents of Sulwe, the hare. He knew well how to employ those most expressive elements of African speech, the so-called descriptive radicals or ideophones. You who have read Captain Rattray's excellent collection of Akan-Ashanti tales will recall examples of their use.

"Then the Black-Colobus Monkey grasped a branch of a tree, *kra, kra, kra*"—you can see him climbing.

Tikonokono (big-big-head) climbed a tree. He plucked some of the children of the fig-tree and went on plucking and plucking, and throwing them down to his companions. He asked whether they had enough and they told him to look down. And when he was about to lower his head to look, then his head hit the ground, saying *Kum!* You cannot doubt the terrible shock Tikonokono got when you hear that *Kum!*

In another tale Ananse, the Spider, took a long rope-creeper and wound it around the Python—*nwenene, nwenene, nwenene!* And in another, the Sky-god released the rain, and it pattered down *tal tal tal tal!* All the streams were overflowing, and the water creatures, the Shrimp, the Mussel, and the rest, got up and *twom!* went the water as they plunged in.

And so when Mungalo told of how Tortoise wangled

it that his friend Vulture should carry him to Vulture's home in the heights and how Vulture, startled by being addressed in mid-air, let go his hold, Tortoise fell, *pididi, pididi, pididi!*—down, unhastily, inevitably, inexorably down.

Yes, these ideophones lend an extraordinary vivacity to a narrative, accompanied as they are by appropriate gesture and pronounced in the fitting tone. Depending so much as they do upon sound and gesture, and the personality of the raconteur, it is hopeless fully to translate these tales—the essence of them largely evaporates.

If we judge the tales told by a capable narrator—judge them by the criteria we should apply to an English short story, intended to be recited to an audience, we shall see that they stand the test. A story should, we are told, grip from the first sentence; there should be no dallying to describe the heroine's eyebrows or the brilliance of the moon. Plunge right in, is a good rule. So the African begins: "Hare went to borrow an axe from Tortoise with the intention of felling trees in the forest"; and every listener is eager at once to know what happened. "They say there was once a Queen Mother, and that she bore a beautiful girl. There she was; but when they gave her in marriage to anyone, she refused to marry." So begins the Akan teller of tales, and holds the attention of his audience from the first sentence. The incidents follow in logical sequence until the climax is reached and the tale comes quickly to a close. I do not say that all African tales reach this pitch of excellence; some of them are wearisomely prolix, but large numbers are up to this standard. Many of them break off into song; one of the characters sings a line or two, and there is a chorus. The narrative proceeds and again the solo and chorus are repeated.

And as the listeners hang eagerly upon the lips of the narrator, they laugh, they roar with laughter, they roll



from side to side with laughter. They may have heard it all before many times, but they enjoy it none the less. And the tedium of the day is forgotten as they enter into this other world of wonder and fun. They are carried out of their cramped, narrow, earthly existence into the freer atmosphere of fancy. The tales are intended to amuse, and they do amuse. That is one of their functions.

If I were an employer of labour in Africa I should make a point of always seeing to it that there were accomplished tellers of tales in every company of my men. It would help enormously to keep them in good humour.

I cannot enter in detail into the substance of these entertaining narratives. They may be divided into tales about human beings, and tales in which animals intermingle with human beings. What we term "romance," in the narrow sense of love and marriage, is by no means absent from the themes. How men secure brides and maidens husbands is a topic of perennial interest. Perhaps the old, old story of a man or a maid who marries above his or her station in life, as we say, appeals as much to Africans as to other people.

The Mbundu people of Angola tell of the ambitious son of Na Kimanaueze who aspired to the hand of the daughter of Lord Sun and Moon. But how was he to court her? He was minded to send Hawk and Vulture with a message, but they confessed their inability to fly so high. Then Kaxundu, who is also Mainu, the Frog, volunteered, and, of course, was told that what was impossible to people with wings was utterly beyond his powers. But he persisted. He had discovered that women came from heaven to draw water at a certain well; and entering the water he managed to hide himself in their water-vessel. So he was carried to heaven and there he left a letter where the Lord Sun would find it.

Lord Sun read that a man wanted his daughter, but he took no notice. Frog returned to earth in the same manner that he had left it; and after a time carries another letter to Lord Sun. This time Lord Sun accepts the offer on behalf of his daughter on condition that the son of Na Kimanaueze comes in person, bringing the gift that is the earnest of what is to follow. Na Kimanaueze does not go, but sends Frog again with the wooing-present, or bride-wealth. Lord Sun, who before this had discovered the identity of the messenger, entertains Frog to a feast signifying that all is now in order for the son of Na Kimanaueze to fetch his bride. But how shall he mount up to heaven? Frog undertakes to secure that the daughter of Lord Sun shall descend to *him*. So he goes back to heaven and finding the maiden asleep, plucks out her eyes. In the morning there is consternation in heaven, and the diviner is called in. He diagnoses the case correctly and orders that the girl be taken to her husband. Next day the Lord Sun orders Spider to weave a large web reaching down to earth. So the celestial maiden arrives on the earth and is met by Frog, who gives her back her eyes and escorts her to the son of Na Kimanaueze. "Akal'a," says the Mbundu narrator, which is his way of saying, "So they lived happy ever after."<sup>1</sup>

As an instance of animal story pure and simple I cannot do better, perhaps, than outline a well-known episode in the adventurous history of the Hare. He is the embodiment of all trickery—the merriest of rascals. This episode is told, with some variation, over pretty well the whole of Bantu Africa, with certain variations. This is the Ila version.

At a time when water was scarce all the animals gathered and said: "Let us go and dig out the water-hole." Only Hare refused to share the toil; he said:

<sup>1</sup>Heli Chatelain, *Folk-tales of Angola* (1894), pp. 130 *seqq.*

"I have my own supply of water." The animals said: "As you refuse, O Hare, to help, if we see you getting water out of our hole we shall kill you." When the digging was done, they set Munyumbwi, the Gnu, to watch. Then Hare came along, and Munyumbwi drove him away. As he was turning away, Munyumbwi saw that he was carrying a calabash on his back and said: "What's that?" "In my calabash," said Hare, "there is *mangwalozhi* (i.e., something bound in bark-string) and if a grown person is not tied up he cannot eat it." "Give me a taste," said Munyumbwi. When he knew the niceness of it, Munyumbwi said: "Tie me up." So Hare tied him up firmly, entered the hole and drew water; then he went off leaving Munyumbwi bound. After a time the other animals came to drink and found, to their amazement, that the mighty Munyumbwi was helpless. They jeered at him, set him free, and left Shumbwa the Lion to guard the water. "If you see Sulwe, bite him," said they. But Hare returned, and Lion succumbed to his blarney; as did the Elephant later. "Sulwe is too much for us with his cunning," the animals had to confess. Then Fulwe, the Tortoise, volunteered to stand guard, and he had his body covered with bird-lime. Presently he saw Hare coming: "Let him come," he said to himself, "he shan't draw water." Hare did not attempt to deceive Tortoise with talk about *mangwalozhi*. He simply tried to shove him aside from the mouth of the water-hole; and his arm stuck fast. He kicked Fulwe with his feet, and his feet stuck fast. Said he: "If I butt you with my head you will die." But Tortoise said nothing; and when Hare butted him, his head stuck fast. He swished round his tail and his tail stuck. Then the big ones came, seized Hare, and killed him. And that is the end of Hare's history.

It is all very amusing.

## 2

I must hasten on to another function of the folk-tales. They offer a *means of release* for pent-up emotions.

You will remember that Krylov, the Russian, wrote and adapted many fables which became exceedingly popular among his fellow countrymen. In the days of reaction Krylov kept the favour of the Court while his sympathies were with the common people and with progress. It was dangerous to express his sentiments openly, so he pictured the oppressive and reactionary officials in the form of animals; as the churlish wolf; the unscrupulous fox; the amiable, blunt-headed or cunning bear; the strong, well-meaning, stupid elephant; the ass always clamouring for a rise in his status. Krylov's fables got past the Censor and as they circulated among the people his prototypes were easily identified. And the people, groaning under the oppression of these officials, experienced infinite satisfaction in finding them made to look ridiculous in this way. To tell these fables, and to laugh over them, was a kind of vicarious revenge and provided an outlet for their outraged feelings.

Now Captain Rattray has suggested that in the Akan stories the names of animals and even the name of the Sky-god himself, have been substituted for the names of real individuals whom it would have been very impolitic to mention. "Later, no doubt," he says, "such a mild *exposé* in the guise of a story came to be related *qua* story. The original practice is still resorted to, however, in order to expose some one whom the offended party fears to accuse more openly, or to escape the African law regarding tale-bearing and libel." In other words, the tales afford the people satisfaction by expressing the thoughts and emotions that are repressed through fear. In a similar way Captain Rattray explains

what he calls "the most Rabelaisian passages" which occur in some of the tales he has recorded. They are not due to a liking for nastiness; for the Akan peoples, like Africans in general, preserve a certain decorum in their speech. Yet in the tales, as he says, "Subjects ordinarily regarded as sacred, *e.g.* the Sky-god, the lesser gods, fetishes, spirit ancestors, the sick, chiefs, sexual matters, appear to be treated as profane, and sometimes even tend to become the subject of ridicule." Why is it? Once when watching a dramatic sketch depicting an old man covered with yaws, Captain Rattray asked a man whether people habitually laughed at persons afflicted by the Sky-god in that terrible way. The man explained that in everyday life nobody would be so unkind as to ridicule such an afflicted person; but as in regard to such an one, so in regard to the cheating and tricks of priests, the rascality of a chief, it was good for people to have occasions to talk about and laugh at them. Following up this interesting explanation, Captain Rattray discovered that in olden times it was a recognized custom for anyone with a grievance against a fellow villager, a chief, or even the King of Ashanti, to hold him up to thinly disguised ridicule, by exposing some undesirable trait in his character—greed, jealousy, deceit—introducing the affair as the setting to some tale. A slave would thus expose his bad master, a subject his wicked chief. Up to a point the story-teller was licensed. He took care, moreover, to protect himself by a public declaration to the effect that what he was about to say was just make-believe—after the manner of novelists who protest in a foreword that their characters are not to be taken for living persons. The African goes further: he avoids the use of personal names. A great chief may become the Sky-god; another character the Spider, and so on. And so when the listeners to a tale hear of a very clever gentleman outwitting one who bears the name of a chief

and is very powerful, and when they hear of that same clever gentleman being himself unmasked and outclassed by another who to all appearance is a very meek and mild individual, then he is pleased, and all the time he thinks of certain chiefs or priests or diviners whom he dare not name aloud; and he rejoices in the whacks they are getting by proxy. Captain Rattray recalls several customs which prove, he thinks, beyond a doubt, that West Africans had discovered for themselves the truth of the psycho-analysts' theory of repressions, and that in these ways they sought an outlet for what might otherwise become a dangerous complex.<sup>1</sup>

That all this is not by any means confined to West Africa is shown, I think, by a kind of dramatic tale which I translated years ago from a Suto original. The Basuto were wont to give free rein to their feelings about their chiefs on the occasion of the annual Pitso, or tribal assembly. On that day any commoner had full liberty to criticize and express his grievances. Perhaps the story I refer to was composed, or became popular, when the old custom was falling into decay. It tells of a Pitso of the birds in which the locust bird, the pigeon, the fink, the stork, arraigned the Chief, Phakue (the hawk), and his councillors, the Crow, the Vulture, and the Eagle, because of the merciless manner in which they "ate up" the tribe. The demand is made that Phakue be deposed. Motinyane, the locust bird, opens the debate: a little old man was he, with greyish head, and in his hand he held a stick. "My masters," said he, "you will say, What is that thing which begins this discussion? Truly, I am nothing before you; nevertheless, I do not care to die and always to have my children die. I have only one thing to say and that is, Phakue must come out of the chieftainship. He is destroying the nation. I am a very little thing; I am kept running about all day long and

<sup>1</sup>R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-tales* (1930), preface.

when I stop I am in a great sweat. I do not know whether as I am such a little thing Phakue will not put me into his nose. Phakue, are you not ashamed to be such a chief? You chase even nobodies like us, the clan of Motinyanel!" Other birds follow, condemning the chief as a cannibal and ravisher. He is stoutly defended by Tsemeli, the Butcher bird, and others. "Scize! beat! Put to flight! kill! It is your right!" says Tsemeli to him. Phakue speaks in his turn, and wise old Ntsu, the Vulture, closes the discussion. It is all a delicious satire upon certain of the Basuto chiefs. And as the people watch it being acted, they get some release for their deep-seated resentment.

It would be worth while to pursue this aspect of our subject further, but I must pass on to my third point.

### 3

African tales not only amuse and express feelings; they are educative. As I said in a previous lecture, I take education to be the whole process by which a people's culture is handed down from one generation to another. Whether the education is conscious or unconscious—whether, that is to say, the young person, the educand, is aware or is unaware of being educated—the tales have a very conspicuous place in the instruction.

In recent years the educative value of story-telling has come to be recognized among ourselves—by educationists, I mean: parents have always realized its value in practice. Tales are seen to be the natural forms for revealing life; the natural carrier of racial tradition or information and ideals. They are declared to have two functions: they are a moulder of ideals; and they are an illuminator of facts.

What is now so widely recognized by modern educa-

tionists has always been realized by Africans. They teach very largely by telling stories.

Our educationists divide the life of the young person into periods, and say that each period demands a particular set of tales. From three to six, the child dwells in a realm of realism, is interested in familiar things. Stories like that of Mother Hubbard and her unfortunate dog; stories that contain much repetition and introduce the cries and calls of animals are appropriate to this period. From six to eight the child passes through a stage when the imagination is very active, and he craves fanciful tales that picture a larger experience than he has attained to. Then he passes into another realm of realism, when barbaric fighting instincts manifest themselves, and he looks for true tales of heroic deeds. And from twelve or thirteen onwards he wants stories of a higher type of heroism, stories of chivalry, and romance.

So far as I am aware, we do not know whether the African child passes through these consecutive stages in the same way. Africans have tales that fall into all the categories named, but whether the tales are graded in the telling so as to be appropriate to the psychological growth of the young people, I do not know. There is here an interesting and profitable field for study.

Let us consider, with reference to our Africans, the two functions which tales fulfil, as moulders of ideals, and illuminators of facts. We will take the latter function first.

I wish to point out that the group of Africans around the village fire is a school of language. The story is an illuminator of facts about the mother-tongue.

We know very little about the process by which African children learn their complicated and beautiful language; but we do know that they rapidly learn to talk it with fluency and accuracy.

So far as my experience goes, it is very rarely that a



grammatical solecism (such as that frequently on the lips of educated English people, "Between you and I") can be detected in their everyday speech. There are no books of grammar; no formal instruction in language. They learn by the natural method of listening and imitating; and I am confident that the tales play a very essential part. Like our own children, the African children do not object to a story being repeated; but they like it told in the same words—little *tales* as they are, they resent revolutionary changes. Forms of expression are heard over and over again, until they become thoroughly familiar. You are inclined to wonder that young Africans should have such extensive vocabularies: you cease to wonder when you know the tales they hear. In this way language, one of the most important aspects of traditional culture, is handed on to the new generation. Some tales are told to draw attention to particular modes of expression and to ridicule people who make mistakes in regard to them. Take care of your nasals! is very good and very necessary advice to one who studies a Bantu tongue. Instead of formulating a rule about it, or merely uttering a precept, the Ba-ila tell a tale to impress it upon the memory. Certain travellers, they say, were hospitably received in a village; and their hosts told them: "When you have eaten this dish *mukandile*, you shall eat with milk." As soon as they had finished their dish the travellers arose, took their spears and began to prance up and down as if they were at a funeral. The villagers were astonished, and asked, "Who is dead? Whom are you mourning for?" And the travellers said: "We are mourning because you said, 'When you have eaten this dish *mukadile*, you shall weep'." "No," said their hosts, "we said *mukandile*, not *mukadile*." Mind your nasals!

The Ba-ila tell another story to ridicule certain people who asked for directions and were told that at a certain

point on the road they were to swerve—*pinukà*—to the left; and these foolish folk on reaching that point lay down and slept so long that the termites built upon their bodies. When aroused and asked why they slept there on the road, they said: "We were told to *pinukà* on reaching here." The joke is that they took *pinukà*, to swerve aside, for *pinukà*, to lie down and sleep: a difference in tones.

But tales are much more than illuminators of language; they convey to the new generation what the forebears have learnt, or think they have learnt, about the world around them. A large proportion of them is made up of what Rudyard Kipling called Just-so stories: you remember his delightful answers to the questions: How the camel got its hump? How the leopard got his spots? In more learned language, these are etiological myths. They explain how things came to be what they are. The point here is not that these stories are abreast with modern scientific knowledge; they are not. But they convey in the most fascinating way the elders' observation and reflection upon the facts of their experience. They respond to the universal questioning of children about the origin and reason of things.

This kind of tale is so familiar that it is hardly necessary to quote examples.

The Ashanti have a perfectly lovely tale to explain why the cat is cared for in the house, sleeps on its master's bed, and eats out of a plate; while the dog (he generally fares badly in Africa) lies out on the dead ashes of the fire and is beaten. They tell, too, why the spider has a bald head. Among the Ba-ila I wrote down tales which answer such questions as these: Why the Ringdove is ringed about the neck; Why has Honey-guide authority over honey; Why Squirrel has a tail and Coney has none; Why Wart-hog lives in a burrow; Why Zebra has no horns; Why the cracks in Tortoise's

shell; Why Hornbill has such a big beak and Tomtit (Ntite) a small one.

These tales, if they do not convey exact zoological knowledge, at least draw children's attention to natural facts, and make the animal world an interesting one.

But it is not only such things as these that are made the theme of tales. The great facts of human life and the origin of things are illuminated to the young African's mind by means of stories. Numerous instances prove that the African has reflected much on death and how it came to be—for he seems to be convinced that it was not in the original constitution of the world; he tells tales which embody his thought of the disaster that befell men. Sociological facts are illuminated in the same way. How did divorce originate, and murder, and incest? How did the practice of taking a friend—a great thing in the African's experience—come into being? And then, too, what is the genesis of heaven and earth, the sun and moon and stars; of man himself? There are stories about all these. And I agree with Mr. Cardinall that the stories are not mere fairy tales or imaginative yarns, to the African, but are absolutely real. They form the background of his thought about the universe. I think that of many of them it can be said that they possess real religious value. Some are told openly on any occasion, others are the sacred and guarded possession of a few selected elders of a tribe and constitute what Captain Rattray calls "the African's Old Testament". But they all go to forming the young people's attitude towards their environment and are therefore educative.

I come to the second function assigned by educationists to the story: stories are moulders of ideals. It is not too much to say of African tales. Africans have ideals, though they may not always coincide with ours. They may not reach to holiness, but they inculcate a high

code of social ethics. If people are to live tranquilly in communities there must be certain recognized standards of conduct; and if these are to be recognized by the young generation the young people must be taught what they are. Moral instruction there must be; and I think many people would be surprised to know how excellent in quality that instruction is. It is to a large degree conveyed in precepts, in maxims, or proverbs. But a still more sure way of instilling the rules into the mind of the rising generation is to embody them in tales which are at once interesting and rememberable.

Take, for example, the excellent rule: "When some member of your family accidentally spoils or loses something belonging to you, you do not claim or accept compensation." The Ashanti put it into a charming tale.<sup>1</sup> There were once twin sisters, they say, and the elder hung about her sister's neck some precious beads, which unfortunately got lost when she was bathing. The elder claimed certain things in compensation—preposterous things like the tail of the Queen Mother of the Elephants. The tale narrates the young girl's exciting adventures in search of all these things. She secured them and also brought home a mirror for herself. One day while they were sitting together the younger sister looked into the mirror and exclaimed: "See, the mirror, when one gazes into it one sees mother, who is in the land of the ghosts!" The elder naturally wanted to have a look, but when she took the mirror she dropped it, and it broke. Now it was the young sister's turn to claim compensation. She refused to receive again the things she had herself laboriously collected and demanded new things of the same kind. So the older sister went out to search for them. But she sought in vain. The people who had been kind to her sister turned their backs upon her, and when she came to the elephants and was intent

<sup>1</sup>R. S. Rattray, *op. cit.*, pp. 89 *seqq.*

upon cutting off the Queen Mother's tail, the whole herd rose up and trampled her to death. "That is why we say, 'If you and any of your blood are living there, and if one of them spoils anything belonging to you, do not exact payment, for Ata Panin did so, and she went and died'."

Many other tales of this kind might be cited. The Ashanti tell a story to enforce the useful domestic rule that *sleeping mat confidences should not be repeated*. They have another story which illustrates the wholesome precept: "When anyone at all is engaged on any work and he asks for help, help him."

Wherever polygamy prevails there is likely to be trouble if the husband excites jealousy by favouring one wife unduly at the expense of the others. Young people hardly need warning against the danger for they see plenty of examples around them. Yet, to make doubly sure, tales are told with the evident intention of putting them on their guard. An Ashanti story warns a polygamous husband never to say: "This is the wife whom I love most." The man of whom it is told had three wives—Wild-pigeon, Hornbill, and Rat. He preferred Rat to the others and let it be known openly. But see what came to pass! He died and Wild-pigeon and Hornbill mourned him aloud: "Du, du, du, du, du, husband is dead, and I shall never eat again until I meet my husband once more. Du, du!" But the much beloved wife, Rat, lifted up her voice and sang: "As for me, husbands are not hard to find! If he's dead, he's dead—and there's an end of it!"

These are all moral tales, but the moral is not always so explicitly stated as in these tales which I have quoted. Africans are like the little girl you have all heard about, who said: "I like the preacher's stories, but I don't like his morals!" A wise story-teller does not force his lesson upon his listeners; he tells his tale, his

parable, his apologue, and lets it work. To point the moral is to excite resentment: as if people were not intelligent enough to see it! Africans show their wisdom in this matter: the tales are often didactic in intention, but the teaching is not obtruded.

Let me quote one of the tales on a very popular theme. It is told by the Bavenda.<sup>1</sup> A certain father found a bride for his eldest son and sent him off with the bridewealth to bring her home. As they were returning the girl began to sing: "I am a beautiful girl, but I have no teeth." He looked into her mouth and was horrified to find a black ridge where the teeth should have been. And he took her back to her father and claimed the return of the cattle he had handed over. On hearing what had happened the second son went to get the girl, for he thought his brother must have made a mistake. But once again on the road the girl sang her song, the black ridge was revealed, and she was rejected with scorn. Then amidst the jeers of his friends the youngest son of the family set out to try his luck. He handed over the cattle, and on the road the girl sang her song again. When he looked into her mouth, lo! the black ridge, and he knew his brothers had not been mistaken. But he acted differently. "Never mind," said this magnanimous, or less fastidious, young man, "let us go on." They came to a river and as they were crossing he seized her, told her to open her mouth, and then scrubbed her mouth vigorously with sand. To his joy the black came away and beneath there shone a set of beautiful white teeth. When they reached the village they were received with surprise, and the girls came to laugh at the bride with no teeth. The father reproached his son with wasting good cattle: "What's the good of a wife with no teeth?" he asked. But to his delight, and to the utter chagrin of the brothers, the girl smiled and

<sup>1</sup>H. A. Stayt, *The Bavenda* (1931), pp. 339 *seqq.*

showed that her teeth were as beautiful as the rest of her comely person. And I suppose they lived happy ever after.

The moral is plain to the meanest intelligence, though it is not explicitly stated: Do not judge by first impressions! And often in these tales the lesson is driven home that hasty judgment is likely to be false.

Mr. Driberg records a tale which relates how a beautiful girl despised her afflicted sister. The beauty looked for a handsome husband and found him in a Colobus monkey. The crippled sister wished to accompany her to her new home, but the beauty turned her back with unkind jeers. She persisted, however, and that night discovered that the handsome Colobus was sharpening his knife with the intention of killing and eating his lovely bride. To cut a long story short, the crippled girl saved her sister, and got her back to her home, where the Colobus on following them was trapped and killed. Then the people rebuked Awil, the beautiful sister who had driven the crippled one away with the cruel words: "Thou dost smell!" They said to her: "Lo, then, did she not save thee?" Thus Awil repented and loved her sister.

Once again the moral is plain to all listeners: don't treat the weak with contempt. And in a multitude of no less interesting stories young people are taught the salutary truth that you cannot transgress with impunity. Obedience is inculcated, and in many delightful tales the old warning is given: Be sure your sin will find you out!

The popular animal stories which are told primarily for entertainment often seem to commend the anti-social vices of double-dealing, falsehood, deceit. That merry person, Hare, is the embodiment of cunning: he is a Machiavelli, a Tartuffe, a downright rogue. He should be a despicable creature; but he is not. He is so variously

and infinitely droll that we cannot but join in the African's laughter as we listen to these wonderful adventures. The stories of Sulwe and the other animals, if they are not of the highest moral tone, at least prove that brain is more than brawn: it is always wit that vanquishes brute strength. If the Hare is at last overcome, it is by superior cunning. The lesson has its dangers, but there is a kernel of good in it. Very frequently in their tales Africans associate evil qualities with repulsive animals: the hyena is greedy, and so on.

Africans are very sensitive to ridicule, and ridicule is a powerful instrument in the hand of those who seek to mould the younger generation to the tribal pattern. Laughter, as Bergson taught us, is above all a corrective: by laughter society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. And so we are not surprised to find that many of these tales poke fun at people who make fools of themselves in various ways.

There is another kind of tale to which I must refer before closing. I call them Conundrums. They appear to be told for the purpose of sharpening the wits, and so are educative in intention. I will quote an example that was propounded to me by the Ba-ila.

A certain man had five children, four sons and a daughter. Some time after his death the daughter disappeared. The mother called the sons together and set them to finding their sister. They were remarkably gifted men. The eldest was able to see things at a very great distance. On casting his eyes around he discovered his sister fifty miles off in the clutches of a lion. The second brother had the power of transporting himself through space unseen, and he rescued his sister from the lion's jaws. On missing his prey the lion went ram-paging about, but the third son killed it. The girl was brought home dead; and the fourth son, by virtue of his



powerful medicines, restored her to life. The mother was overjoyed and taking a large piece of meat she gave it to her sons, saying: "Eat, my sons. I give it to you in gratitude for your cleverness and faithfulness." But the brothers said: "No, give it to only one of us—the one who did most in restoring our sister to you, safe and sound." Here is the problem: To whom should she give the meat? To him who discovered the girl at a great distance; to him who rescued her from the lion; to him who killed the lion; or to him who restored her to life? Who got the meat? The Ba-ila used to argue long and excitedly about this question; so far as I know, they have not yet solved the problem. It is interesting to note that the Bavenda and the Ashanti have very similar stories, a fact which provokes the question: How comes it about that people living so far apart as the Transvaal, Northern Rhodesia, and Ashanti propound what is practically an identical problem? Have they invented it independently, or has it been transmitted across Africa from one tribe to another, or has it come down from a very remote period when the common ancestors formed one people? It is a problem that faces us constantly in our study of African folk tales; but it is not my business to solve it here and now.

I close with another problem—one which illustrates well that genius for friendship which characterises the African. This tale is recorded by Mr. Cardinall; it is told by the Dagomba of Togoland. I only regret that time will not allow me to repeat it in detail. It is a fine example of the imaginative power exhibited in the best of these African tales.<sup>1</sup>

Two boys were born on one day in a certain village; one into a rich home, the other into a poor home. They were exactly alike; it was impossible even for their parents to tell them apart. They became fast friends.

<sup>1</sup>A. W. Cardinall, *Tales told in Togoland* (1931), pp. 183 *seqq.*

When they were grown, the rich man went out to see the world, and the poor man went with him. They came to a town where lived the most beautiful woman in the world; but her guardian spirit had said she was not to marry any man unless he was able to do certain apparently impossible things. The rich young man vowed he would win this wonderful girl. The tests were difficult indeed, and if he failed he would be killed; but with the valid help of his friend he succeeded. He won the girl and they married. On their return home the father of the rich young man gave the two friends a magic knife each—knives made in ancient times by the giants. The poor man planted a silk-cotton tree and when it was grown he told his friend that he was going out to see the world and if the leaves of the tree withered his friend would know that he was in danger. So the poor man set out, taking with him his magic knife. He came to a town where the river which supplied it with water was dried up. The people had in vain sacrificed their daughters to the spirit of the river; and now only one girl was left—the chief's daughter, and she was already deposited at the river for the spirit to take away. The man found her there, waited till towards sunset when the spirit in the form of an enormous python came out and made straight for the girl. With one blow of his magic knife he severed the python's head; whereupon water began to flow from its neck. He took the girl back, but the people refused to receive her since she had been given in sacrifice to the river spirit; so the man married her. But his adventures were not yet at an end. He went hunting one day and found that all the game collected at a sacred hill where, the people told him, lived a dreadful spirit. When he went near, the rock suddenly opened and swallowed him, and all the men who were with him. The next morning the rich young man, far away in his village found the leaves of the cotton-tree withered, and at once

set off to the help of his friend. In course of time he arrived where the poor man had settled down with his wife—and she, poor thing, took him to be her husband, so much were the two friends alike. One day he joined the band of hunters and when they neared the sacred rock he learned the story of it. Against all warning, he approached and when the rock bent over to swallow him he smote hard with his magic knife and the rock fell into two pieces. And out came his friend, and they who were with him. Thus the two friends met again. "Now," say the Dagomba, "tell me which of these two was the greater friend?"

I have but skimmed the surface of this fascinating subject. But I have said enough, I think, to show you that folk-tales play a great part in the African's life and I would close with a quotation from another pen, words with which I wholly agree.

"As each day closes, and the evening meal is being shared by the women and small children round the fire, one sees perhaps the most charming of all sights—the mother as teller of tales and fables. It is the primitive community's preparatory school. . . . All the wisdom of the tribe is in the tales, and the foundation of all morality. All the questions that agitate small boys and girls as life begins to unfold around them have their answers in these tales that are so often little recitatives and songs. They are the primitive's Old Testament. It is no mere play-hour. . . . They are not merely whiling away the time; they are seriously using it. And the time chosen is that at which the mind is most susceptible to the influences of the great outer spaces and the Power that moves amongst them. There is a very wonderful psychological rightness about much of the primitive educational technique, and this use of the evening hour is proof of it. It is the time when the winds are whispering out there beyond the firelight and when—as I was

once assured—you can hear, if you keep perfectly quiet, 'the stars singing to one another'."<sup>1</sup>

All who have to work with Africans should learn the enormous power the imagination holds over them. In teaching them, we cannot do better than follow the path they have marked out for themselves—and make great use of stories.

<sup>1</sup>Cullen Young, *Contemporary Ancestors*, Lutterworth Press.

## Chapter Eight

### A LITERATURE FOR AFRICA

#### 1

**A**MID all the stupendous changes that are taking place in Africa we are witnessing the transition from an illiterate to a literate stage of culture. The old Africa had a wealth of traditional lore handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, and it continually added to that oral wealth; but it had no books, not even an alphabet. Africans talked, as they still talk; they sang, as they still sing; but they did not write, they did not read.<sup>1</sup>

The spreading of literacy has been intimately associated with the spreading of religion. Muslims not only propagated Arabic wherever they penetrated; under their influence some of the African tongues were put into written form and books were produced in Arabic script. This is true of Hausa and Swahili, the two most widespread of African languages. A much greater contribution has been made by white men and women, mostly Christian missionaries.

If Africa had possessed only a dozen languages the task of making the people literate would have been relatively easy; but the 150 million Africans use at least 700—it may be a thousand forms of speech properly

<sup>1</sup>An exception is the Vai people of Liberia; one of them invented a syllabic script. A. Klingenberg, *Africa*, Vol. VI., pp. 158 *seqq.*

called languages, besides numberless dialects. Upwards of 300 of them have been reduced to writing. This is a remarkable literary achievement. Only those who have taken part in it can appreciate the many difficulties that had to be faced. But the builders of African literature have certain advantages over their fellow-workers in other parts of the world. The presence of a virgin field was itself a great advantage. There was no difficult script to learn and use, as in China and India; it was possible to introduce the simple roman characters to which we are all accustomed. Moreover there was no such divorce between the spoken and the written language as is encountered in India and China: missionaries could teach their pupils to write and read in the every-day homespeech.

The literation of African languages was not planned. There never was an international conference which said: "Go to now; let us give Africa a literature. As a first step, let us come to an agreement how the speech-sounds are to be represented by symbols; let us survey the various areas to determine which are the most important languages; and having found them, let us write them down and prepare books." In the nature of things any such planning was impossible. The continent was opened up gradually; only by slow stages could the linguistic situation become known: even to-day it is not fully known—vast regions of Africa are still a linguistic No-man's Land. There was no co-ordination of effort. Men and women of various nationality brought into Africa the orthography to which they had been accustomed; it has been well said that the orthography of African languages became a museum for the preservation of European systems. You might find one section of a linguistic group being taught to spell French fashion and another section English fashion: one would write *ou*, *oa*, while the other would write *u*, *wa*. Differ-

ences between closely allied dialects would thus be accentuated, making the confusion of Babel more confounded still.

Missionaries were not taught phonetics in early days—many (perhaps the majority) are still not taught. When trying to learn languages abounding in sounds strange to European ears they either failed to distinguish them or, if they could distinguish them, failed to register the distinctions in distinct symbols. If a language contains say sixty sounds it is undoubtedly difficult to express them by the twenty-six letters of our alphabet. Too often our African books are almost as difficult to read aloud with any fluency and accuracy as English and French books are to foreigners. If, to take an example from a language that I know, we write the African equivalents of our verbs “to read” and “to carry” with the same consonant and vowel, making them identical to the eye, then inevitably we set up a stumbling-block for the reader; if, on the other hand, we make a distinction in writing as the African makes a distinction in speaking such words, then reading becomes easy, once the symbols have been mastered. An “implosive *b*” should not be written with the same symbol as an “explosive *b*” is written, any more than a *t* should be written when we say “*d*”.

When in 1855, in response to an appeal by the missionary societies, the German philologist R. Lepsius produced a standard alphabet, he proposed to meet some of the difficulties by the use of diacritical marks; and following him missionaries endowed African scripts with a great variety of miscellaneous accented characters—that is to say, with dots and dashes above and below, before and behind, the letters. For a scientific transcription this system was quite valuable but for the practical purposes of a literature it was impossibly complicated. One of the first projects of the International

African Institute was to produce an orthography which, while in accordance with scientific principles, would be practical. For practical purposes it is not necessary to symbolise every minute variation of sound but only those sounds which are significant: the aim is not to satisfy the expert phonetician but to enable simple people to read easily and intelligibly. The Institute proposed to abolish—or at least to reduce to an absolute minimum—the diacritical marks and to introduce a few new symbols.

The ways of the spelling reformer are hard. I took a small part in inducing missions and governments to adopt this new orthography. The pages of one biblical text with which I had to deal as Editorial Superintendent of the Bible Society were fairly peppered with dots and dashes. I printed a sheet without one dot or dash and distributed it in Africa. One missionary to whom I sent it improved upon my experiment. He typed the sheet out, putting the dots and dashes all in the wrong places; and then gave some of his people the three copies to read aloud—the original sheet, my dot-and-dash-less sheet and his falsified sheet. He reported that his people read all three with equal facility, showing how unnecessary the diacritical marks were so far as the Africans were concerned.

The new letters had a mixed reception. In one South African tribe the opposition took on a political tinge. "This is our language," some people said. "Why should the white people meddle and tell us how to write it?" They forgot that white people had written it in the first instance. The reform was suspected to be a subtle scheme of further discrimination between white and black. I induced the Bible Society to print a Gospel in the new script and to distribute copies widely among the literati of the tribe; and there was a revulsion of feeling. Educated Africans wrote to me: "Why! we can



now read straight on without having to stop and think what this word and that means!" And soon they were asking for the whole Bible to be reprinted in the new script.

There were, and still are, many objections. A natural conservatism plays its part. Where a script, however faulty it may be, has been in use for fifty years, it comes to be regarded as divinely ordained; just as some people look upon standard time, so that when we are told to put the clocks back they refuse to depart from "God's time". Financial considerations weighed with others. The fact that they had stocks of books in hand naturally made them shrink from change: upsetting a settled orthography meant the scrapping of plates, the buying of some new type and reprinting; it also meant getting new letters on typewriters. Still, in spite of all opposition, the so-called "Africa" script won its way; in about fifty languages it has been adopted. No doubt, as the advantages it offers become more evident, it will be universally used.

2

The script is only one of many problems that confront the promoters of African literature. A still more serious problem is that offered by the multiplicity of languages. Here we are often impaled upon the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand we acknowledge the cogency of the arguments of those who urge the cardinal importance of the home-speech in education, especially where religion is concerned and all other subjects in which the emotions are involved. I would quote the opinion of the Council of the International African Institute on this point. "The child should learn to love and respect the mental heritage of his own people, and the natural and necessary expression of this heritage is

the language. We are of opinion that no education which leads to the alienation of the child from his ancestral environment can be right, nor can it achieve the most important aim of education, which consists in developing the powers and character of the pupil. Neglect of the vernacular involves the danger of crippling and destroying the pupil's powers by forcing him to express himself in a language foreign both to himself and to the genius of his race." The way to the heart lies through the mother-tongue.

On the other hand, as realists we see the impossibility of creating a literature in every form of African home-speech. You do not attempt it in England or America. Where a language or dialect is confined to a few thousand people it is manifestly a waste of time, energy and money to write books in it, except perhaps a primer or two and a Gospel. And, moreover, by perpetuating local forms of speech you hinder the amalgamation of the people into larger units.

What then are the alternatives to a literature in every language or dialect? The first alternative is to make English or French the universal literary language and abandon all thought of a vernacular literature. The second is to adopt one expansive African language as a literary medium and teach it in all schools to the exclusion (partial or complete) of the local forms of speech. The third is to limit, in any one territory, the number of languages that may be used as literary vehicles.

The first alternative is adopted by the French in their African territories. The latest declaration they have made on the subject runs: "Instruction in schools must be given in the French language, the use in education of local spoken dialects being absolutely forbidden, as well in private schools as in public schools." This is in keeping with French policy which seeks to ensure that

Africans in French Africa should evolve by stages into African Frenchmen. Manifestly the ban on African languages in the schools precludes the possibility of creating an indigenous literature in French Africa. For a number of years the Belgians have been definitely in favour of using the vernacular languages for educational purposes in their Congo colony. In British Africa English is taught, and above a certain standard English is the medium of instruction. It may be that at some distant future English may become the common language of all British Africans, and some educationists contend that this should be the definite aim of the schools; but at present the colonial governments encourage both teaching in the vernacular up to a certain standard and the creation of an African literature.

As for the second alternative, nobody envisages the possibility of one African language serving as a literary medium for the whole African population. But it is possible to select one dominant language possessing expansive qualities and to foster its spread through schools and literature over a wide area. In East Africa, for instance, you have Swahili which is a Bantu language that has assimilated a large number of Arabic words. It was a trade language of the Arab merchants (mostly slave-traders) and their followers, who carried it from the coast far into the interior. If there is a *lingua franca* in Zanzibar, Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda and the eastern districts of Belgian Congo it is Swahili. Its use as an educational and literary medium is being actively encouraged. An Inter-Territorial Committee, set up in 1930, representative of governments and missions, promotes the study of the language and the enlargement of a literature. In all the schools of Tanganyika it is the medium of instruction for the lower standards and no other vernacular is taught. It is also taught in some schools of Uganda as a subject and is the medium of

instruction in areas where the vernaculars are not Bantu. But the local languages are not excluded from the elementary schools. In Kenya also, where Swahili is the official language, other languages are used.

Many Africans who treasure their own tongues and consider these superior to Swahili are strongly averse from having Swahili thrust upon them. Scholars would agree that, for example, the Ganda language has qualities that place it above Swahili in value and would support the Ganda-speaking peoples in holding to it and developing it as a literary medium.

The third alternative I mention differs from the second in not elevating one dominant language to an exclusive position: it selects and encourages several languages. In Northern Rhodesia out of some twenty-three forms of speech the government officially recognizes four and subsidises publications printed in them. In Belgian Congo four of the 200 languages and dialects are favoured. Other territories pursue a similar policy. I think that this course is at present the one to be preferred before the others I have mentioned; but it should not be followed blindly. And here I must plunge into the vexed question of dialects.

In thirteenth-century England there were numberless dialects and all of them were accounted vulgar by the Latin-speaking and French-speaking pedants. Any person who aspired to write English used his own dialect; there was no one standard form. The East Midland dialect ultimately prevailed because, for one reason, it was spoken midway between the southern and northern dialects and therefore became regarded in the nature of a compromise; it was also, more or less, the speech of London, the capital, and of Oxford and Cambridge, the centres of culture. Moreover, it was the dialect in which Chaucer wrote the best poetry of the age, and in which, about the same time, Wyclif's translation of the

Bible appeared. These writers proved the English language's power of expression and naturally exerted enormous influence. The predominance of East Midland was confirmed by the fact that the printers adopted it. It absorbed gradually many of the elements of other dialects. And so the rustic speech of the East Midland counties was fashioned and shaped and became in the course of two centuries the language of Tyndale and Shakespeare, the greatest treasure that the Englishman possesses. Dialect still largely prevails in rural homes but Church, School, Libraries and (in our own day) Radio have all tended to make standard literary English the common speech of Britain and the Commonwealth. In other countries we see the same developments.<sup>1</sup>

In Africa, too, our problem can in part be solved by a similar process. Where a language consists of a cluster of dialects one dialect may be chosen as the educational and literary medium for all the area covered by them; and this dialect, enriched by the inclusion of words and idioms from the others, will in course of time become the standard speech. This is actually taking place now. In Nigeria (to give only one example) Efik, a comparatively small member of the Ibibio cluster, has established itself as a literary language practically throughout the whole language area. Its supremacy is due, in part, to the fact that the Scottish Mission adopted it for literary and educational purposes.<sup>2</sup>

It would, however, I think, be a mistake at the present time to stick too rigidly to one dialect in the writing of books and the publication of newspapers. Some latitude should be allowed. In Northern Rhodesia, one officially recognized language is Tonga, which is really a cluster of three mutually intelligible dialects, Tonga, Ila and Lenje. Some years ago an Ila writer was

<sup>1</sup>E. W. Smith, *The Shrine of a People's Soul* (1929), pp. 80 *seqq.*

<sup>2</sup>Ida C. Ward, in *Africa*, Vol. VIII, pp. 90 *seqq.*

awarded a prize by the International African Institute for a manuscript which was of outstanding merit. I, who had reduced Ila to writing, was amazed by this evidence of what this form of speech could be made to express. When a government grant was applied for to enable this excellent piece of work to be published great difficulty was encountered on the ground that Tonga and not Ila was the official language. Had the subsidy not been given it is probable that the book would not have seen the light and a very promising African author would have been discouraged. To tell him that he must write in Tonga, which is not his idiom, is to handicap him severely. To allow a limited number of highly valuable books in dialects other than the officially recognized one would, I think, be to promote rather than hinder the emergence of a standard language.

Writing, we say, "fixes" a language; and so it undoubtedly does to some degree. But language is a living thing and not to be frozen in a printer's page. If literature is not enriched and invigorated from the constantly changing spoken speech it will stagnate and die. There are limits to the artificial manipulations of language. Attempts have been made deliberately and, as it were, from the outside, to unify African dialects; but they have not been conspicuously successful; such unifications are not a natural growth. More hope is offered by spontaneous and unconscious action on the part of the people themselves. Local varieties of speech came into existence and were established when groups of people lived in isolation. In these days that isolation is breaking down. Africans travel; they mix on European mines and plantations, in the towns, in the army. Where they speak different dialects, they soon discover the common elements and come to speak a comprehensive language. So in South Africa a common spoken Xhosa has come into being. When the languages, albeit

belonging to the same family, are different, men manage to weave something new out of the common fibres; and so such a *lingua franca* as Lingala springs up in Belgian Congo. Our literary languages must not be static; they must develop *pari passu* with the spoken speech. There is a reciprocal inter-action between the two: the literary influences the spoken; the spoken influences the literary. When a popular book circulates in a dialectal area its vocabulary and idiom pass into the colloquial speech; when writers use dialect words and idioms these pass into the standard literary language. In this way localism gradually fades away. It may be, as many expect, that closely allied languages will in time be amalgamated. The African Babel is in process of being debabelized.

## 3

A pertinent question may be raised: Are African languages capable of being the vehicle of literature in the real sense of the word? Anyone who reads some of the translations of the Bible, or some of the poetry now being written by Africans, will, I think, be convinced that the answer is in the affirmative. Bantu languages have marvellous flexibility and powers of expression. The indigenous vocabularies are very rich and even exuberant. They are said to be deficient in technical terms needed for the writing of scientific books. I have heard the same thing said of other languages. When I visited Cairo University and found lecturers speaking English and French, I was told the foreign media were necessary because Arabic lacked the necessary terminology. A second reason given—which was perhaps the true one—was that the lecturers did not know sufficient Arabic. In a High School in Palestine I heard Arab lecturers giving lectures in botany and geology and was told that they had either found the technical terms in

Arabic or had invented or borrowed them. We have done that in English. How many words were at the disposal of King Alfred? Could he have written a scientific treatise on entomology without going beyond the resources of Anglo-Saxon? People have words only for the things and concepts that are familiar to them: Shakespeare had no word for "appendicitis" or "aeroplane". We are apt to forget that only about forty per cent. of our English words are native; the rest are naturalized foreigners.

African languages show a marvellous capacity for expansion. Sometimes the meaning of native words is extended; thus *ngwala* "to scratch a mark" becomes "write"; and *bala*, "count", becomes "read". Foreign words are given an African phonetic form: thus "screw-driver" is heard as *sikudarebbe*. They are sometimes so transformed that their own mother would not recognize them. They are invested with African prefixes and suffixes and so compelled to express subtle variations of meaning. From Dutch, for example, the word *skroef*, "screw", is taken and given the form *sekurufu*. The initial *s* has now become the normal nominal prefix *se-*; and *-kuruf-* as a root is treated as hundreds of Bantu roots are treated. So we get a series of verbs:

ho-kuruf-a: to screw  
ho-kuruf-ela: to screw in  
ho-kuruf-esa: to screw tight  
ho-kuruf-olla: to unscrew.

Africans have great fun in finding names for the numerous new things that white men have introduced. They may borrow the name, but often they invent one. "Motor-cycle" is not so good as the onomatopoeia: *thutbutbu* or *kpokpokpo*, as the Akan say. A missionary may wish to turn "bicycle" into *bicbikiletta*; but it fre-



quently happens that the name a white man wants to give to a thing is rejected by the Africans, and they invent their own. What white man would ever have thought to call a bicycle *namundelele*, "a spider's web"? Linguistic purists may wish to coin words, but African schoolboys and others may prefer to Africanize English words: they will have *inkyi* ("ink") instead of *Kyere-wadweu* ("writing medicine"). The white man's word will sometimes be strangely twisted, as when "influenza" is changed into *umfula wenja*, "dog's valley". A Hausa scholar overheard a man say: "I have had a *dunja* with so-and-so." He thought this was a native word that was new to him; but on enquiry he found it was the English "danger". DANGER displayed on the railway had, by an obvious association of ideas, come to mean "a violent collision, a fierce quarrel".

I cannot pursue further this most fascinating subject, the Africanization of foreign words and concepts. By invention, by borrowing, by adaptation, the African vocabulary grows every day. It must grow if the languages are to live. I have no doubt these languages will prove to be magnificent vehicles of literature of the highest kind.

## 4

That fervent servant of God, Dan Crawford, gave himself in the early days of his ministry entirely to preaching and translating the Scriptures. It was only when he had completed the translation of the Bible that he awoke to the fact that there were no readers, and no readers because he had neglected to open schools. From the point of view of a missionary who pinned his faith to his Bible, he then said: "the great initial lack in Africa is a reading population. . . ." He became convinced that the only way of pressing home the Gospel to a village with

a personal heart-thrust was by means of schools. "A mere passing visit, a Gospel address in a village, followed by the old dreary relapse into heathen silence for a year or two, cannot do this. The challenge (for it is more than a call) comes from the people themselves. The black man of these lands has a similar question to that of the black man in the Acts: 'How can I read except someone teach me?' Import a million Bibles, and the land will ring out a million queries: How can we read except someone teach us?"<sup>1</sup>

If it is foolish to prepare books where there are no readers, it is at least equally foolish to teach people to read and not supply them with plenty of books to read. No one could claim, I think, that up to the present the provision of vernacular literature has kept pace with the provision of schools. The virtue of printer's ink has never yet been fully recognized in the African mission field. Missionary societies have sent out trained medical men and women, trained nurses, trained teachers, trained agriculturists and artisans; but how many have selected men and women with literary gifts, given them special training, and sent them out to write books and edit newspapers? Such scanty literature as exists has been produced mainly by enthusiasts in such moments as they could snatch from other exacting duties. Things have improved in recent years, I acknowledge. Literature committees, representing governments and missions, have been appointed and these have planned books and encouraged authors to write them. Commercial publishers have entered the field and produced school-books. The United Society for Christian Literature has been increasingly helpful both in subsidizing and planning books in the vernaculars and English. The Nigerian government has set up Translation Bureaus. Since 1929 the International Committee

<sup>1</sup>G. E. Tilsley, *Dan Crawford*, pp. 477, 479.

on Christian Literature for Africa, under the energetic leadership of Miss Margaret Wrong, has given a great filip to the task of providing the books. All these are welcome signs that the needs are being recognized. But supply still falls far short of the demand. Recent events have emphasized this fact.

The British Government has set itself to secure improvement in the health and living conditions of the Colonial peoples for which it is responsible and to develop political institutions and political power until the day arrives when the peoples can become effectively self-governing. For the accomplishment of this task one of the most essential and urgent measures needed is the widespread development of education. The whole mass of the people must share in this education. This is the conclusion reached by the Committee appointed in 1941 to consider the best approach to the problem of mass literacy and adult education in the more backward dependencies.<sup>1</sup> Literacy is one of the essential steps towards improved village welfare and better standards of living. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian leader, expresses the truth succinctly when he says: "Every reform will founder on the rock of illiteracy." How can democratic institutions flourish when eighty or ninety per cent. of the community is unable to read? The Committee called for the wide extension of schooling for children with the object of reaching universal school within a measurable time. If all the children could be gathered into school immediately, and if adequate cheap literature could be provided, illiteracy might be abolished within a generation. But the Colonies cannot afford to wait for educational progress to be achieved through the schools alone. States like China and Russia with great numbers of illiterate peasants have found that it was essential to teach adults as well as children if progress in backward

<sup>1</sup>*Mass Education in African Society* (1944), Colonial No. 186.

areas was to be accelerated. So the Report from which I am quoting calls for "the teaching of literacy to all adults under (?) fifty years of age." Their reasons are summarized under three heads:

(a) It has been proved that the attainment of literacy makes people aware of the need for social and economic improvements, and therefore they will co-operate more readily with welfare and other agencies working on these lines.

(b) The rapid changes in family and village life make it imperative to give the people every possible means of understanding and controlling what is happening among them. Health measures in the home and village, enlightened training of children, correspondence with absentees, budgeting and account keeping—all become possible and in time acceptable to a literate people.

(c) In order to progress towards self-government in the modern world colonial peoples must learn to read, and to understand, not only about their own local affairs but those of wider import. If control in local government is to be on a wide and democratic basis, it cannot nowadays be in the hands of a mass of ignorant and illiterate people.

Literacy, the Committee think, is not an end in itself. It must be promoted as a means of attaining a higher standard of life, and must therefore be linked with all other measures making for advance. The aim thus defined may seem to be utilitarian. Let us say that literacy is the key which opens the door to the understanding of all things and to the possibility of the African's expressing of that understanding for the benefit of his fellows.

In considering how to achieve mass education the

committee express the opinion that the provision of literature and reading material at a price which Africans can afford has first priority as a technique. The cinema and broadcasting have their place, as have music and the drama, but the first place is given to books. \*

That this programme of adult education is not visionary is shown by experience with the African troops in the late war. Hundreds of thousands of these men were taught trades and also to read and write. Army education officers report on the keenness to learn. The demand for books was overwhelming. These Africans will have carried back to their homes a new sense of the value of reading and writing and should be a nucleus around which the new mass education can be constructed.

## 5

One day, not many years ago, a London publisher went exploring in his store-rooms. He found a stack of Victorian school books and told his manager to pulp the rubbish. "Oh, no, sir," the manager protested, "they are too valuable to destroy. There is a market for them. We ship them to West Africa!" In those days any old thing was thought good enough for Africa—even discarded school primers. A radical change has taken place since then. Now much intelligent effort is devoted to providing books that are suited to African conditions. We cannot contest the African's demand to learn English and to read English books. Any attempt to exclude our language from African schools and to concentrate upon African languages would be futile and would be deeply resented by Africans. All the rich resources of our literature must be made available to them. But at present I am thinking of books written in the African languages. What kinds of books are needed?

The Churches naturally want books to feed the religious life of their flocks. In the past they have largely made this their aim. Missionaries have translated the Bible, or the New Testament, or at least one integral book of Scripture, into about 300 languages and dialects. They taught reading primarily so that their converts might read the Bible: a Bible-reading, Bible-loving people was their dream. It is devoutly hoped that in all our efforts to give the African a library of books we shall not forget the Bible. I would recall Thomas Huxley's words: "It forbids the veriest hind who never left his village to be ignorant of the existence of other countries and other civilizations and of a great past stretching back to the furthest limits of the oldest nations in the world. By the study of what other book could children be so much humanized?" Not only do children, and adults too, get to know from it something of the sweep of human history; they are introduced to great personalities and the greatest of all Personalities; they learn what are the moral forces making for the greatness of nations, the evils that make for their decadence. Any African who knows his Bible through and through cannot be called uneducated. And ancillary to the Bible, commentaries, handbooks, catechisms and other devotional books are necessary. For the training of evangelists and ministers I should like to see a series of theological text-books written from the African point of view, expounding the relation between the African's old faith and the Christian doctrine.

But specifically religious books are not enough. A wide copious general literature permeated with Christian principle is called for. Primers and Readers, manuals of hygiene, agriculture, economics, business management, local self-government and many more subjects have already appeared and must be multiplied. For the promotion of adult literacy these can hardly be

made too attractive; and should to a large extent take the form of cheap booklets. The new literature, however, must be more than utilitarian. If we are to have a reading public, people must be provided with books which they can read with sheer enjoyment—they must have fancy as well as fact. The tale-loving Africans will absorb much of the new learning through works of imagination. Many of the gems of English literature will be translated for them. Books will familiarize Africans with the new world into which they are entering; others should acquaint them—and especially the young generation—with their own country, its past history and institutions. An ever-present danger is that such stress may be laid upon the new that the old may slip into oblivion. Africans educated in our schools are often woefully ignorant of their own land and its peoples; and if you blame them they reply with reason: We were never taught these things in school. They may know the names of the Kings of Judah and the names of the Plantaganet kings, but of the heroes of their own race they know little or nothing. Many African tribes have faithfully handed down their traditions and these should now be recorded in print.

My preceding chapter illustrated very imperfectly the wealth of oral "literature" in the form of folk-tales: there are also poems, songs, legends, proverbs, all of which should find their way into books. A fascinating book could be made of the African myths of Creation and the First Men. In unskilled hands this traditional lore might be presented without the vigour, the charm and wealth of expression, that an expert African raconteur would put into it; but a skilled and sympathetic writer should reproduce it with fidelity so far as is possible in written form. It is imperative, I am convinced, that Africans should learn to know and respect their heritage. They are told that in British Africa at least their pro-

gress should proceed, not by a complete breaking with the past, but by evolution; that modern institutions are to have some continuity with the ancient: this is all implicit in what is called "Indirect Rule". They should know, then; what they have inherited from their fathers. They will fail to evaluate the transformations which are taking place unless they realize that the new is not being planted upon a virgin field. Much of the past is embedded in their language. Literature must subserve the growth of a healthy national consciousness. Much of the past can be presented in the form of novels.

And this leads me to the question: Who are to write the books? Inevitably the bulk of these has been produced hitherto by men and women who are foreigners to their readers, albeit they have called in the aid of African helpers. Here, as in other matters, we must remember Thomas Fowell Buxton's motto: "The deliverance of Africa is to be effected by calling out her own resources." We have trained African ministers, teachers, evangelists, agriculturists, doctors, artisans; now we must look to the training, and the encouragement, of African authors. From this point of view, one of the best things the British Government has done lately is to select men and women in various African territories and send them to the London School of Oriental and African Studies for specific training.

We have no doubt now that there is literary talent among the Africans. This is shown by translations of outstanding merit which some have made from English into their own languages. Of Soga's version of the *Pilgrim's Progress* in Xhosa and Plaatje's version of the *Comedy of Errors*, Professor G. P. Lestrade (who knows what he is talking about) says: "Both these works are veritable treasure-houses of the linguistic riches of their respective languages, and show to a remarkable extent their authors' faculty for grasping not merely the



language but the thought of the European originals and expressing that thought in idiomatic and vigorous Bantu prose."<sup>1</sup> A similar tribute might be paid to some original works. It is not easy to bring this excellence home to people who do not know the languages; but as proof I would refer you to four books written in different parts of Africa and translated into English: viz. Thomas Mofolo's historical novel, *Chaka*, and his *The Traveller from the East*, composed in Sotho; F. Kwasi Fiawoo's play, *The Fifth Landing Stage*, composed in Ewe and translated by himself; and Samuel Yosia Ntara's novel, *Man of Africa*, composed in Nyanja, and translated by the Rev. T. Cullen Young. These books not only enable us to see African life from the inside, but even in translation they exhibit a pure literary quality which charms a reader.

South Africa has led the way in African authorship: there are sufficient authors to warrant them meeting in Conference; and proposals have been made for the foundation of a Bantu Academy. In the period 1939-43 about twenty publications by Africans appeared in the closely allied languages, Tswana and Sotho—poetry, drama, prose fiction, history, biography. It is notable that the favourite theme of the novelists is the adventures of young men and women who go from rural areas to the towns and mines with the belief that "to travel is to see". Xhosa and Sotho have each produced at least one notable poet: Mqayi and Bereng. Other parts of Africa are coming on and will catch up to the South.

The International African Institute set in the forefront of its aims the encouragement of African authorship. Year by year it has offered prizes for the best books written in certain languages. Up to 1945 more than 400 manuscripts in 39 languages have been sent

<sup>1</sup>G. P. Lestrade, *Western Civilization and the Natives of South Africa* (1934), p. 124.

in and 97 prizes have been awarded. The subjects chosen by the writers are many and various; and their productions differ very greatly in quality. Some, as might be expected of first attempts, are very poor stuff indeed; others show considerable promise; and a few are excellent. Ntara's book I have mentioned won a prize in 1928. In all, we may say that the Institute's experiment has been successful in stimulating Africans to write, and other organizations have followed its example by offering prizes to authors.

One thing is clear. If an indigenous literature is to be achieved the study and use of the languages must be promoted in the schools, not only in the elementary stages but all through to the university colleges. Neglect of the vernaculars in favour of English leads many Africans to despise their mother-tongue. The complaint is frequently heard that educated Africans, who speak excellent English, cannot express themselves in their own language without committing solecisms, cannot even spell the words correctly. It is even said that the drive for study of the vernacular and creation of an indigenous literature comes not from the Africans but from white men. If there is any such tendency to turn their backs upon the mother-tongue, the increased prestige which the languages will acquire as they become literary will, one hopes, turn the current in the opposite direction.

One other question has to be faced. Ultimately an African literature, if it is to thrive, must have an economic basis, i.e., must be self-supporting. At present, publication is possible for very few books apart from a subsidy given by Government, by Literature Societies, or by private persons. The help is necessary because the sale of books is too small to meet the cost of production and distribution. Sales are small because of (a) the high percentage of illiteracy; (b) the poverty of

potential readers; (c) the absence of a reading habit. There is here a vicious circle: lack of readers means a lack of books; and a lack of books means a lack of readers. An English book might command a sale of a hundred million copies; any African book to-day (other than a school book) would be fortunate if a thousand Africans bought it. African authors, like their brethren in Europe and America, are entitled to the reward of their labours in hard cash; and unless a man has such itchy fingers that he cannot but write, the doubt whether authorship pays is probably a real deterrent.

I end this book on an optimistic note. During the past fifty years I have often been pained, and tempted not so much to despair as to furious anger, by contemplating the injustice meted out to Africans by my fellow white men. I believe that a better day has dawned. Never before have so many able and devoted men and women applied themselves to the understanding and solution of Africa's problems, economic, hygienic, educational, religious. Never before has there been so large a measure of co-operation between Europeans and Africans for the redeeming of Africa. Africans are coming into their own—no longer regarded as mere producers of wealth for the rest of the world, or as recipients of a somewhat condescending charity, but as men and women with gifts of personality and leadership to be respected and fostered. Let us revise the Psalmist's prophecy and read, not "*Ethiopia shall haste to stretch out her hands unto God*", but "*Ethiopia is coming with full hands to God*". And in that faith let us work on—not *for* but *with* the Africans.

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